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The Hungarian Quarterly

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Béla Pomogáts

The Idea of Hungarian Autonomy in Transylvania

Ever since the political changes of Christmas 1989 in Bucharest, Hungarian political spokesmen and the Hungarian press in Romania (Transylvania) have repeatedly given expression to the idea of a measure of autonomy for the Hungarians there. This reflects a long-cherished goal of 1.8 million Hungarians in Transylvania. In the almost 80 years since Transylvania was ceded to Romania in 1920, Hungarians have often expressed their belief that they can only expect protection against Romanian nationalism and against forced assimilation through legislation and the effective operation of self-government.

The idea of self-government has surfaced more than once in various forms. The idea of autonomy has become an organic part of Hungarian policy in Transylvania. In 1918, Oszkár Jászi, Minister for Nationalities in the short-lived Károlyi government, devised the Hungarian state as a system of national autonomies, and the leaders of the Romanian National Party, with whom he was negotiating, also promised autonomy for the non-Romanians of Transylvania. The establishment of the institution of national autonomies was specified as a goal at the mass meeting in the city of Kolozsvár (Cluj), on 22 December 1918. The meeting took place a few days after the Romanian National Assembly in Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia) announced the union of Transylvania and the eastern fringe of the Hungarian great plain with the Kingdom of Romania. The decisions passed on the future of Transylvanian Hungarians were being made as the occupying Romanian army advanced. The scheme of national autonomies that Jászi designed unfortunately came too late, and the Kolozsvár decisions were never implemented. The fate of Transylvania was decided by arms and was confirmed by the Paris peace treaties.

The idea of Hungarian self-government in Transylvania, however, has been kept on the agenda in one form or other. Hungarians who had to settle to their status as a minority voiced their conviction several times,

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at least in the late 1910s and the early 20s, that only a legislated autonomy can allow them to preserve their culture in their own language and to shape their cooperation with the Romanian people. The number and proportion of Hungarians living in the territories annexed to Romania—Transylvania and three other eastern Hungarian regions (the Banat, Kőrös and Máramaros regions)—provided an appropriate basis for such a self-administrative system. Of the over 5 million population in this territory at the end of the Great War, 54 per cent were Romanian, 32 per cent Hungarian, 10 per cent German and 4 per cent other (Serb, Slovak, Ruthenian or Bulgarian). Romanians were then in an absolute, though not overwhelming, majority and the non-Romanians, above all Hungarians and Germans, could legitimately claim either territorial or cultural autonomy.

In the Middle Ages, half the population in historical Transylvania and the Hungarian territories later to be annexed to Romania was Hungarian (including the Székely or Szekler regional group), one quarter German (Saxon), who had been settled there in the Middle Ages, and another quarter Romanian, who first appeared in Transylvania in the late 11th century—no earlier mention of them is found in historical sources—and did not start to play a role of any significance in its history before the 19th century. These ethnic proportions tilted in favour of Romanians during the 16th and 17th centuries, when the Hungarians in the river valleys and towns suffered from the raiding Turks and Tartars. The Romanians, however, who lived in the mountains, were largely spared, their numbers even increasing when a sizable amount fled from the principalities ruled by Phanariote Greeks, who were appointed by the Turks. By the early 18th century, Romanians were in majority in Transylvania, where they made up more than half the population.

Yet in several regions in Transylvania, such as in Székelyföld, the land of Szeklers along the Eastern Carpathians, and in the region adjacent to the Great Hungarian Plain, i.e. the western borders of Transylvania, as well as in the big cities—Kolozsvár (Cluj), Nagyvárad (Oradea), Marosvásárhely (Tîrgu Mureş), Arad and Szatmárnémeti (Satu Mare), the Hungarians were in majority. In Southern Transylvanian areas and in other cities such as Temesvár (Timişoara), Brassó (Braşov) and Nagyszeben (Sibiu), the majority was German. Urban culture on the whole in Transylvania was either Hungarian or German, as were the overwhelming majority of burghers, professional people and factory workers. Of the 49 towns in Transylvania in 1918, only two were of a Romanian character.

Romanianization of these towns started only after 1920 and was completed under the communist dictatorship. In the course of forced industrialization, Romanian villagers in great numbers flooded the towns of Transylvania, while Hungarians were denied the right to move there. The overwhelming proportion of Germans and the Hungarian-speaking Jews of Romania, under Romanian–German

and Romanian–Israeli, in no small measure financial, agreements, left during the 1970s and moved to the Federal Republic of Germany and Israel, respectively.

The legal situation and nationality policy aims of the Hungarian minority in Transylvania were determined in principle by the Alba Iulia (Gyulafehérvár) Resolutions, with the declaration of Romanian national unification, and by the minority agreements complementing the Paris peace treaties. Article 3 of the Resolutions formulated the national rights of non-Romanians in Transylvania as follows: "Full national liberty for all the cohabiting nations. The language of education, administration and the courts for all will be the vernacular. All the nations will be ensured the right of representation in the legislative and governing bodies of the country in proportion to their number." Article 8 of the agreement on minorities *"Traité entre les principales puissances alliées et associées et la Roumanie"*, signed by the Romanian government in Paris on 9 December 1919, stated the following: "No Romanian citizen may be limited in the free use of any language in private, business or religious life, in publication in the press or anywhere else or at public meetings." Article 11 contains the following resolution, which opens up the possibility of free national development for ethnic minorities: "Romania agrees that in religious and educational matters the Transylvanian Székely [Hungarian] and German public bodies be permitted to set up local self-governments under the control of the Romanian State."

Such resolutions and decisions marked out certain perspectives for a solution of the national question; yet they have never been implemented. The Romanian government declined to incorporate in the Constitution or to implement the Alba Julia Resolutions and only signed the Treaty of Paris under the pressure of the victorious great powers. The 1923 Romanian Constitution did not mention self-government for the national minorities, which was earlier allegedly granted, and spoke merely of "Romanians" enjoying equal rights as citizens, "irrespective of racial, linguistic or religious differences". The notions of legal and minorities policies in Romania were based on the étatist ideology of a "political nation", just as was Hungary's minority policy after the 1867 Compromise with Austria, which Romania had condemned and which it argued against with success as a point of reference at the peace conference as activities that had suppressed minority nations. However, Hungarian Magyarizing minority policies before 1918 were largely muted by the general liberal spirit of the age, while Romanian minority policies after 1918 were far from liberal; on the contrary, they were aimed at forced assimilation.

Traditions of autonomy in Transylvania

In the Middle Ages Transylvania enjoyed autonomy as a province within the Hungarian Kingdom. After the Turkish invasion in the 16th century, which resulted in the dismemberment of Hungary into three, the principality of Tran-

sylvania, that was established in the southeastern part of the country, acquired sovereignty as a state under an agreement between Prince John Sigismund Zápolya and the Emperor Maximilian II in 1571, and was barely limited by the suzerainty of the Porte. Status of the principality as a separate crown land was guaranteed by Emperor Leopold's 1691 Diploma when the Habsburgs expelled the Turks. Transylvania as a crown land enjoyed self-government very much as the Kingdom of Hungary, Bohemia or Croatia did.

Notions of Transylvania's separateness and autonomy were revived by Transylvanian Hungarians (also Germans and Romanians) before 1918, who aimed at more independence for public and cultural life in Transylvania as a result of political and cultural decentralization. Hungarian democratic political and cultural movements in Transylvania sought in the development of this greater independence not only a basis for modernizing a backward economy but also an alleviation of nationality conflicts. Many people in Transylvania thought that giving up the earlier relative autonomy as a result of the 1867 Compromise with Austria, which unconditionally accepted the revival of the 1848–49 union of Hungary and Transylvania, and exposed the nations of Transylvania to Hungarian imperialist unification, was a mistake.

The idea of autonomy surfaced even more widely after Trianon amongst Germans as well as Hungarians and, to a smaller degree, those Romanians in Transylvania who distrusted the Bucharest government. As subjects of the Empire, Romanians in Transylvania felt closer to Western values and ways than did their fellow Romanians from the Old Kingdom, who had not long before been liberated from Turkish suzerainty. Indeed, over a third of the Romanians of Transylvania were of the Greek rite in union with Rome and not members of the Romanian Orthodox Church. Before the peace negotiations began in Paris, when the Hungarians of Transylvania could not have known with any certainty the actual new borders the Allies had in mind, some Transylvanian Hungarian intellectuals suggested an independent Transylvanian state based on the partnership of the three nations—Hungarian, Romanian and German, and an autonomous Transylvania within the Romanian state.

The idea was presented at Dicsőszentmárton (Tirnaveni) in the form of a memorandum by Elemér Gyárfás, earlier Lord Lieutenant of Kisküküllő County, Chairman of the County National Council after the 1918 Hungarian revolution, and forwarded to Emil Haţieganu, the Romanian minister for Transylvania, in Kolozsvár (Cluj), on 24 March 1919. The *Consiliul Dirigent* in Nagyszeben (Sibiu), the temporary Romanian government in Transylvania, never replied. After the military occupation of Transylvania, and especially after publication of the peace treaty provisions, the autonomy of Transylvania, a major demand of the Romanian nationalist movement in Transylvania during the 19th century, was no longer on the agenda.

Crying out loud

Newspaper articles and political pamphlets in the early 20s regularly expressed the demand for national self-government. Such demands were aimed at autonomy for the minority rather than territorial revision. One example is a famous pamphlet drafted by Károly Kós, Árpád Paál and István Zágoni, which was published on 23 January 1921 in Cluj, under the title *Kiáltó szó Erdély, Bánság, Kőrösvidék és Máramaros magyarságához* (Crying out loud to the Hungarians of Transylvania and the Banat, Crisana and Maramures Regions). This epochal pamphlet was written in the wake of the historical realism that followed self-examination and the romantic elevation of having faced up to the fate of the nationality. "We have woken up," the novelist, architect, artist and politician Károly Kós (1883–1977) wrote. "We want to see clearly. We want to face Life and have a clear picture of our situation. We want to know ourselves. We have to take stock of our strength and organize our work, and we have to be aware of the purpose we want to achieve. [...] I am calling out to you, thousand-year-old Hungarians of Transylvania and the regions of the Banat, Crisana and Maramures: wake up from your two-year-long slumber, open your eyes and look around, join those who want to jostle in the new life. Flying time clamours in your ears: Enough of apathy. What so far has been a remedy and perhaps protection, in any case honour, will henceforward be poisonous and cowardly. I am shouting the password: we have to start building and organize ourselves to work. I am calling out the goal: national autonomy for Hungarians!"

Kós urged acceptance of post-war reality and wished for a genuine understanding between the majority nation and the minorities, declaring allegiance to the Romanian state. He expected that peace and mutual trust between Hungarians and Romanians would eventually bring fulfilment of national desires—maintenance of language and culture, security and economic progress. He also saw in the guarantee and structure of autonomy a pledge for the survival and development of the Hungarians of Transylvania. The other two authors of the pamphlet, journalist and member of parliament, Árpád Paál and journalist and politician István Zágoni, undertook to expound the idea of autonomy and provide a legal and historical background. Beyond ensuring an independent development of the national culture and a free national self-organization, they also demanded territorial autonomy and the compilation of a national register.

The idea of a national register came from the Austrian Social Democrat Otto Bauer who, following up his fellow Social Democrat Karl Renner's earlier thoughts on national minorities, in his work *Die Nationalitätenfrage und die Socialdemokratie* (The Nationality Problem and Social Democracy), published in 1907 in Vienna, recognized that a nation "is to be defined not as a territorial body but purely as an association of persons", and that self-government of nations and ethnic minorities must be set up on the basis of an ethnic register, i.e.

the citizens' "free declaration of their ethnicity", thereby organizing citizens of the same nation or ethnicity into a public body independent of the territorial principle.

István Zágoni's draft for Hungarian autonomy in Transylvania thus relied in equal measure on the traditional Transylvanian idea of territorial self-government, which was also taken into account by the Paris minority agreement between the Entente powers and the Romanian government in 1919, and on the idea of cultural autonomy based on an ethnic register expounded by "Austro-Marxists" for the purpose of modernizing the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.

This draft on autonomy by Kós, Paál and Zágoni was never seriously considered and discussed by Romanian politicians, albeit the Transylvanian Hungarian Party, the political organization of the Hungarian minority, did their best to realize plans for self-government. The only Romanian political party which in the Ciucea Pact of 1923 gave any noteworthy concessions to the Hungarians, was the right-wing People's Party led by Marshal Averescu, which appeared on the political scene in the early 1920's. The pact, however, never became operational.

The plans for autonomy of the late 20s and early 30s, which tried to create a legal and political framework for the self-government of the Székely counties along the Eastern Carpathians and the Hungarian-inhabited territories in general, met with a similar fate. Examples are a minority bill moved in 1927 by the lawyer Gyula Tornyai, a 1928 motion submitted by the Social Democrat leader Géza Deutsch, the plan for Székely religious and educational autonomy drawn up by the lawyer Gábor Tusa in 1929, the plan for Székely self-government drawn up by the legal expert on the minority question Arthur Balogh in 1932, the ideas of the former Lord Lieutenant of Kolozsvár (Cluj), József Papp, on the establishment of local governments, or another plan of Árpád Paál's on "local educational self-government", which went into great detail on its legal regulation. All these drafts and plans failed to survive resistance by the powers that be in Bucharest, even though they could have greatly contributed towards normalization of the situation of Hungarians in Transylvania and political stability in the Carpathian basin.

The crossfire of nationalism

Hungarians in Transylvania accepted integration in the new Romanian state, provided they possessed territorial or at least cultural self-government and could create their own institutions. Romania's nationalist policies, however, denied these wishes, since they not only sought to consolidate the territories that were ceded after the war but also aimed for full ethnic and cultural assimilation in these areas. Despite the Alba Iulia Resolutions and the stipulations of the agreement on the protection of minorities, the ethnic minorities, which made up over a quarter of the population of greater Romania, have never been granted

genuine equality, let alone self-government. On the contrary, they have had to accommodate themselves to existing in a state of permanent self-defense under the crossfire of Romanian nationalism.

The Bucharest National Assembly passed a number of laws limiting the rights and self-assertion of minorities. The land reform of 1921 in several districts disregarded the rightful interests of the peasants who belonged to ethnic minorities and even became a means of the Romanianization of regions inhabited by them. The 1924 Law on Citizenship denied several hundreds of thousands of non-ethnic Romanians citizen's rights. The 1924 law on "private tuition" and the 1925 law on the school leaving examination radically reduced the number of non-Romanians eligible for education in their native language. All this followed the closure of the Hungarian university in Kolozsvár (Cluj) in 1919 by the Romanian authorities and its becoming Romanian, and the Romanianization of secondary education with the exception of Church schools. The franchise reform of 1926 allowed such abuses as resulted in meagre parliamentary representation for the ethnic minorities, and the Romanian National Assembly soon deteriorated into a caricature of the parliamentary system.

Measures such as "name analysis" also served the purposes of reducing the importance of minorities and furthering their Romanianization. It meant that Hungarian children whose names did not sound particularly Hungarian were forced to attend Romanian schools. Another such measure was the establishment of "cultural zones" with an eye to the increased Romanianization of Hungarian-populated counties. A similar purpose was targeted when a pseudo theory on the Romanian origins of the Székelys was argued as an ideological overture to their "re-Romanianization". The extended maintenance of a state of emergency, the activities of military courts and censors, frequent confiscations of, and ban on, newspapers greatly reduced the opportunities for public life and cultural movements of the nationalities and successfully obstructed the prospects for any self-government for the Hungarians of Transylvania.

Amid these rapidly deteriorating circumstances, intellectual life and in particular the literature of the minorities could still preserve a degree of autonomy. Hungarian literature that was being written under Romanian rule had to replace those political, social, scientific and educational institutions that had been dissolved or were absent, and take over from them the role of maintaining the national identity of those living as a minority in Romania and the roles of protecting and developing their culture. In fact, all those efforts and movements which were emerging in Transylvanian Hungarian society sought to assert themselves in *belles lettres* and in literary life from the mid-20s onwards. Politicians and journalists turned authors and gave voice to the Hungarian minority experience, its injuries and desires in poetry and fiction, some of it first rate. This situation yielded the literature of Transylvanianism, in which the liberal and pluralist traditions of Transylvanian history were revived and which sought to carry on the

legacy of autonomous development. The place for Transylvanian literature was thus in the very heart of Hungarian cultural and public life, and literary works were permeated by a strong communal sense and sense of national identity.

After the Second World War

The idea of Transylvanian autonomy resurfaced again with greater emphasis in the 40s when, because of the political changes that had taken place, in the late summer of 1940, the Romanian government and, in 1945, the Hungarian government would have welcomed the idea of a self-governing, possibly even a sovereign, Transylvania. All Hungarian governments of the interwar period were seeking territorial revision. They hoped to achieve it primarily with Italian and British support; the British government indeed was ready to acknowledge failure of the Trianon peace treaty to live up to standards of justice. Territorial revision was eventually achieved with German and Italian support in the autumn of 1940 when, under the Second Vienna Award, northern Transylvania, i.e. about 40 per cent of the territories ceded to Romania, was returned to Hungary. The territory was populated by over one million Hungarians and close to one million Romanians. Yet Hungary had to pay a heavy price for this award in the form of commiting herself to the Germans—to which the Romanian government incidentally committed themselves too.

The Hungarian army and the Hungarian administration were welcomed by the Hungarians of Transylvania as liberators. The Hungarian government, however, failed to heed Prime Minister Count Pál Teleki's words (who committed suicide some months later when the Hungarian Army marched into Yugoslavia) and grant the Romanians there considerable concessions, among other things cultural autonomy, thereby exacerbating an already poisoned Hungarian–Romanian relationship.

The Paris peace treaties after the Second World War restored the Trianon borders. The Hungarians of Transylvania again found themselves under Romanian rule. Demand for autonomy strengthened anew. A plan for such a solution was drawn up in 1945 by the Social Democrats in Transylvania and was aimed at territorial autonomy. By then, however, the idea of Transylvanian autonomy was no longer realistic—the Central and Eastern European peace treaties of 1947 were heavily influenced by the Soviets, and the Hungarians of Transylvania again had to rely on their culture, above all literature, for an assertion of their interests.

A sense of public calling and the ethos of serving the public good in literature has never diminished since then. As the institutions of Transylvanian Hungarians were being annihilated or reduced to mere nominal activity, so the significance of culture and literature increased. The idea of autonomy for ethnic minorities in Transylvania was denied any public forum for decades, the chronicles at best registering such endeavours. Which is what happened in the brief

period right after the war, under Petru Groza's government, in whose relatively tolerant atmosphere a number of minorities institutions were established that could have contributed towards a cultural autonomy of some sort, had they been allowed unbroken development. Such institutions included the Hungarian People's Association, a separate Hungarian Writers' Association, the Bolyai University of Kolozsvár (Cluj) and other institutions of higher education and science, as well as the Hungarian educational system itself.

It is difficult today not to suspect that the political concessions that had been granted the Hungarians were mere tactics, even if not devised personally by Prime Minister Groza. With these gestures, Romanian politicians aimed at influencing the Paris peace conference and elicit through them favourable territorial decisions. Indeed, they actually managed to achieve the dropping from peace treaties those guarantees for the protection of minorities that had been spelled out in the post-Great War agreements.

After the restoration of the Trianon borders and the abolition of legal protection for minorities, the promising process of building up ethnic self-government came to a halt in every respect, and the earlier existing institutions slowly withered. This affected not only bodies like the Hungarian People's Association but also individuals, the political and spiritual leaders of the Transylvanian Hungarians, among them Pál Szász, chairman of the Transylvanian Hungarian Economic Association, the Roman Catholic Bishop Áron Márton, József Venczel, former director of the Transylvanian Scientific Institution, Gyárfás Kurkó, chairman of the People's Association, József Méliusz, chairman of the Hungarian Writers's Association in Romania, Edgár Balogh, rector of the Bolyai University, Lajos Csögör, rector of the Medical School in Marosvásárhely, and many others—all of whom were harrassed and eventually gaoled.

As a replica of the Soviet model of self-government, the Hungarian, or later, Maros-Hungarian, Autonomous Province was created in the new situation. It provided anything but genuine self-government and was aimed instead at isolating the Székely-inhabited counties. It operated as a caricature of self-determination. Romanian minorities policies, which had always been devised so as to suppress the ethnic and cultural identity of Hungarians in Transylvania and to enable assimilation, continued in the decades of communism (1947–1989). The Bucharest regime, headed by Nicolae Ceausescu, especially from the 70s onwards, made a point of breaking the identity of Hungarians and destroying their national culture by doing away with the greater part of Hungarian educational and cultural institutions and then, in the framework of what has become notorious as "village systematization", sought to achieve assimilation by uprooting and forcefully resettling Hungarians. Ethnic self-government as an idea could be maintained in the circumstances only in opposition thinking. A recent example of the autonomy plan was elaborated in the mid-80s by the contributors to the samizdat magazine *Ellenpontok* (Counterpoints) edited by the poet Géza Szőcs.

Endeavours and expectations

Official Romanian nationality policy aimed at destroying the ethnic and cultural identity of Hungarians and at assimilation has been maintained after the collapse of the communist regime in 1989. It has thus opposed the autonomy plans drawn up by the Democratic Association of Hungarians in Romania (RMDSZ-UDMR), in November 1993, entitled "On Ethnic Minorities and Autonomous Communities", the draft prepared by József I. Csapó in August 1994, under the title "A Statute of Personal Autonomy for the Hungarian Ethnic Community in Romania", and the draft he also elaborated for the autonomy of Székelyföld, the region inhabited by the Szeklers, in 1995.

The Romanian governments, the National Assembly in Bucharest and Romanian political parties have regularly rejected and ignored such plans. The fight for self-government is for the future. This rejection may perhaps be changed under President Constantinescu and his government, in light of the reforms introduced in state administration and a novel approach to minorities, especially if such reforms continue.

The new political role the RMDSZ, the Hungarian political party in Romania, has undertaken in coalition with the democratic parties and participation in the new Bucharest government, may contribute towards an assertion of the right of self-government of the Hungarians in Transylvania. The democratic parties which make up the Romanian government are inclined to extend minority rights, a necessity if the country seeks integration in Western institutions and wishes to join NATO and the European Union—efforts also supported by the Hungarian government.

The RMDSZ works for the achievement of minority language and educational rights with considerate, well-devised policies. The organization is, however, not entirely unified on certain points, namely the justification for, and the political mileage expected from, participation in the coalition government by the political party of Hungarians in Transylvania. The radical wing is led by the respected Calvinist bishop, László Tőkés, honorary president of the party and hero of the 1989 Temesvár (Timişoara) events; the moderate wing by the president of the party Béla Markó, a poet whose literary activity has been important.

Hungarians in Romania thus have to go on defending their own interests, a struggle which calls for both bravery and sobriety. Hungarian autonomy in Transylvania is in the interest of all Hungarians in Romania, as well as of the country itself. The country is expected to create a democratic political system and nurture good relationships with its Western neighbour, a Hungary which will soon be a NATO and EU member.

A political struggle that has lasted close to a century must sooner or later lead to results, especially if it receives the unambiguous support of the mother country, and particularly so if the plans for autonomy are in harmony with similar developments elsewhere in Europe. Indeed, it can be said about the Transylvanian Hungarian plans for autonomy that, in their entirety, they satisfy the norms and standards that govern the progress of territorial, cultural and personal autonomy in Europe. ❧

John Lukacs

A Thread of Years

(Excerpts)

Readers of *The Hungarian Quarterly* will find here three chapters from *A Thread of Years*, to be published in February 1998 by Yale University Press. For most articles or books an Introduction is unnecessary: their contents ought to speak for themselves. In this case, because of the unusual nature of *A Thread of Years,* a short introduction cannot be avoided.

The book consists of sixty-nine chapters of a few pages. Each bears the title of a calendar year: 1901, 1902, 1903, and so on.—*The Hungarian Quarterly* has chosen the chapters 1919, 1948, 1963 for this advance publication, because of the Hungarians who figure in them.

In this odd book each chapter consists of two parts. The first is a description of a particular place and of particular people—their behaviour, their talk, and the inclinations of their minds at that particular time. Allow me to call these "vignettes." The second part of each short chapter is a dialogue. Then and there a second person challenges the significance of the vignette as written by the author, his friend, since that significance is debatable: why *these* people? why *this* place? why *that* time? why *that* scene? For not only do these places differ; none of the people therein are the same.

This second person is my alter ego. How and why and when this dual structure came to my mind I cannot tell. I must also eschew the main part of the Introduction to be printed in *A Thread of Years,* which describes the main theme of this book ("This book does not have a story. But it has a theme") simply because that is not relevant to the three chapters printed here. All I will say is that none of my vignettes deal with historic personages or with great dramatic events. They are period pictures, even though an underlying theme exists, alluded to here and there: the *petite musique* of a *grande histoire.* Perhaps half-dozen of these annualized vignettes

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deal with Hungarians and Hungary. (There are another half-dozen where Hungarians do appear). The reason for this is that when I struggled with what to write, say, for 1904 or 1919 or 1940 what came to my mind were some things about my native people or my native country; and one ought to write about things and people one knows best; and in these cases I had to place them within a certain time, a particular year. The people are invented. But the historical situation is not.

Yet *A Thread of Years* is neither a novel, nor a historical novel. This calls for a brief explanation. The historical novel appeared first in the early nineteenth century, inseparable as it was from a then developing historical consciousness. From Walter Scott to Tolstoy and to others it occurred that a historical background may make their novels more interesting and perhaps even more telling. Yet that genre of the historical novel belonged largely to the nineteenth century, it is outdated now. During the twentieth century, then, something else has been happening: the hybrid that has the silly name of "faction." Writers who have been trying this include such different persons as Upton Sinclair, Dos Passos, Styron, Doctorow, Vidal, Mailer, Sontag, Pynchon, even Solzhenitsyn. For them history is no longer the background but the foreground. This is interesting, a further subterranean development of a historical consciousness. Yet their works are flawed—for they illegitimately and sometimes even dishonestly mix history and "fiction" up and together. They include and twist and deform and attribute thoughts and words and acts to historical figures who actually existed. This is illegitimate, since it produces untruths. I am trying to do the very opposite. Instead of attributing words and thoughts and acts to famous persons who did exist, I am writing about everyday people whom I invent, but whose plausibility exists because of the historical reality about their places and times. My book may be an attempt at a new genre. Do not take this too seriously. My attempt is imperfect; and I have no interest in inventing startlingly new forms. At the end of this century I am dubious about anything and anyone who claims to be avant-garde; and as for *An Idea Whose Time Has Come* (Victor Hugo's hoary nineteenth-century phrase) well, it is almost certain not to be any good. Meanwhile, historical writing still has a long way to go. History has not yet had its Dante or its Shakespeare. That will come one day, and my book is not that. For, while it is not a novel, it is not history either. Yet my purpose is historical. My pictures—the vignettes—are meant to attract the reader's interest to certain people in certain places and in certain times: *couleurs locales* that ought to be good enough to linger in his mind.

Well after completing my book the sudden thought came to me during a visit to Hungary: a Hungarian writer, a *great* Hungarian writer, ought to rise one day and begin the writing of a history of different Hungarian minds through the twentieth century, in sixty or eighty or one hundred vignettes, a work that would be similar to mine but the execution of which must be different *and* better. So there is an idea whose time *will* come... because it *must.*

1919

Droop, drear, despair in Vienna, where the misery of people in 1919 is existential, being no longer the outcome of neurosis but of the proletarian state to which the city has fallen, due to war and defeat and the end of an empire. Drooping skies, dreariest sentiments, despairing convictions of a population accustomed to their egotism, which is now compounded with self-pity, the overlay of charming Viennese insouciance gone at least temporarily, with so much poverty, sickness and hunger around. Cold rain; mendicant streets; the November sky the colour of sour milk. In the afternoon the rain is abating, the wind hurries some of the clouds away, a thin orange glow spreads in the west, and suddenly the wet pavements glisten under the street-lamps that, perhaps surprisingly, are as assertive as they were before the war and so is the clanging of the trolley-cars. There are hard white electric lights under the wrought iron and glass palm-leaf canopy of the Hotel Bristol, an island now, in a wallowing sea of poverty beating up against its revolving doors. Behind that the Bristol's ephemeral clientele is not what it was but a few years ago.

In one of its small panelled smoking-rooms sit three men, from Hungary, related to each other, and whose category is not easy to define, since they overlap, but let me try. One is an escapee; another is a refugee; the third is a fugitive of sorts. Each of them are, temporarily, Displaced Persons, though in 1919 this bureaucratic term does not exist, it will be devised by an American or United Nations' bureaucracy after the Second World War. The escapee has some money, it is he who suggested that they meet at the Bristol that afternoon. He is not staying here, but he knows the place, though he is cautious; he asked the other two to come for a cup of tea, not dinner, though they could surely use a good hotel dinner. The fugitive is stocky, the refugee thin as a rail, the escapee sleek rather than thin with the commencement of a paunch. The fugitive has a short thick neck and close-cropped frizzy hair, the refugee's long lanky black hair and lined face make a sorrowful countenance, the escapee is the only well-dressed (or should I say, hotel-dressed?) one among them, in a grey American sack suit and a high collar.

The fugitive fled from Budapest to Vienna four months ago, on the thirty-first of July, to be exact. He was a Vice-Commissar in the Budapest Communist government of Béla Kun that gave up the ghost that day, after 132 days of a fool's paradise to some (including himself), of a hell for some of its victims, and of a purgatory for nameless and countless others. There was no fight left in these admirers of Lenin and Trotsky when a plenitude of Romanian troops were advancing on Budapest, and when they saw a plenitude of hatred in the faces of those people in Budapest who were The Others. The fugitive escaped across the Austrian frontier disguised, with false papers, hoping in the—reluctant—hospitality of the Socialist authorities of "Red" Vienna. In reality,

the latterwish to get rid of him and of his ilk, which circumscribes his situation now.

The refugee took refuge in Vienna in August. He was not a Communist, only a *marxisant* intellectual. He had nothing to do with the Communists' rule, but soon after that the furious hatreds of the Anti-Communists smote Socialists and Communists alike, especially if they were Jewish. The janitor of his apartment house denounced him to a group of White Cadets. At the university a burly student threatened him with a cane. He hurried down the wide cold stone staircase of the main university building. Other students were laughing. "Don't go out on the street," his tremulous mother told him. Soon he sat huddled in a cold smoky train, taking refuge in Vienna from the White Terror that, he thought, would have to pass soon. He is the poorest of the three in that smoking-room, though he has a smidgeon of pocket money; he writes articles for a Hungarian emigré Social-Democrat weekly, now appearing in Vienna.

The escapee is his cousin who has escaped to Vienna not from Budapest but from New York. A long lost cousin, who translated himself from the old world of Budapest to the New World in 1910 or 1911, after having embezzled money from his firm and being found out soon thereafter. Emigration to America was his way out, as was the way of perhaps ten other people on the boat—petty fraudsters, cashiered officers in debt, deserters of respectable middle-class girls, that is, progenitors of their illegitimate children, escaping scandal and ire—a small and motley and class-conscious minority among the horde of poor peasants, the huddled mass of emigrants to America. Sailing across a rough ocean in such company, on a packed ship of the Austrian Lloyd (his parents paid for his passage) he resolved to become rich in America, and never to travel in such conditions again. Well, he made money. He started a photographic studio with an Armenian, mostly illustrations for advertising. He had dabbled with photography in Budapest, he had artistic ambitions, for a while he was doing amazingly well. Then he got involved with one of their lovely rapacious models, he ran into debt, he quarrelled with the Armenian. He was irregularly (and often ineffectively) hounded by creditors, but he still had to give up his prize possession, a large apartment containing a studio, at a smart address in a new red-brick apartment house in the East Fifties; he could no longer pay the postwar rent. So he is now an escapee from New York, where some people told him that with a bit of luck, and connections, one could turn a thousand dollars into a small fortune in postwar Vienna. He is an American citizen now, with an American passport, and with nine hundred dollars in his wallet.

Now the three of them sit together in Vienna, nervous and uncomfortable. The American cousin steered the others away from the large lounge-chairs in the hall of the Bristol, into that little smoking-room where they would be less apparent: for there is no good reason to be seen in the company of a recent Communist commissar (or with another obvious refugee from Budapest)

in the hall of that hotel, engaged in serious, if not agitated, conversation. One must be careful, especially now. As a matter of fact, all three of them are in a kind of a trough though only months away from the zeniths of their respective fortunes. Less than half a year ago, only last June, there was a moment when he, the American, thought that radiant Manhattan was his oyster (with that copper-haired and vulgar-tongued—yes, that was among her charms—long-legged young slut being the pearl within): when a Russian had come along, offering a rather fabulous plan with a minimum of investment (his)—a theatrical photo agency, the first photographic super-agency for Broadway, etc. It was then that he broke with his Armenian partner; but three weeks later, when he threatened to sue the Russian, the Armenian threatened to sue him, and he was evicted by the girl as well as by the management of the Lombardy Arms, East Fifty-Third Street. A year ago there were a few weeks when his cousin, the refugee intellectual, thought that he was among the vanguard of the agnostic creators of a new humanity in the republic of Hungary; of a new progressive radical elite replacing the remnants of feudalism and clericalism, decaying fat nobles with wine and sausage in their cheeks. He and his cohorts would reform Hungarian culture, he in partial charge of the universities, but soon it became apparent that the government governed nothing, that the ideas that he and his friends cherished were not only impractical but stale. Forgetting Ideas, the Fact remained: he and his kind were now despised by people whom they had thought to lead or represent or serve. Less than four months ago there was the time when the fugitive was actually in power, a member of the government of the Hungarian Republic of Councils (that is, Soviets), drafting domestic orders, telegrams, cables, with a hotel suite, an automobile, and an actress (so to speak) at his disposal, to boot. Now he was nearly penniless in Vienna, his name among the first on the list whom the Hungarian government sought to arrest (and perhaps even condemn to death *in absentia*.)

However, he is a survivor. He looks like what he is, a tough little bully, devoid of scruples, able to hold his own among others of his kind, whether in Budapest or Moscow or perhaps even in New York. His American cousin suspected that he would push for a small (and almost surely unrepayable) loan, but no: he has a little money left from an international Communist fund. He needs his American citizen relative for something else, for a paper—a so-called "affidavit"—to facilitate his entry (he has no passport) to the United States. "You're not going to Moscow, I see?" The fugitive permits himself to grin: there is work to be done, among Hungarian-Americans, in the United States, he and his comrades see eye to eye about that. "I can give you a paper; but you must not use my name after that." The sorrowful intellectual drinks his tea, (with plenty of sugar), he doesn't ask for anything, except for attention when he talks about the Reactionary Forces in Budapest. There is a constant light pain somewhere in the region of his heart, a feeling of guilt as if it were compounded with a small sense of

shame. The bitter taste of defeat in his mouth has gone down into his throat and perhaps to his lungs, even.

The atmosphere around this threesome is sour rather than bitter. They are wary of each other. They are of the same background, born and raised in the same district on the Pest side of the Danube, but their lives have taken such different turns, they are not a band of cousins, companions, comrades in defeat. One thing they have in common, besides their provenance. They still believe that what has happened to them is only a temporary retreat in what they think is the great progress of the world. And about that they are wrong.

*

"There is a sarcastic touch in this dreary vignette—and it is dreary—which your readers will not like, and which I do not like. It is not like you, so please explain."

Is it that sarcastic? They are Period People. That is more important than the fact that Vienna in November 1919 was a period place, and I know that my description of the place in this vignette is hasty. I am interested in those three, in their characters and in their ideas...

"And why, if I may ask?"

They do have one big idea in common...

"Which is that they are Leftists, each in his own way?"

Only roughly put, in a kind of intellectual shorthand. They, including the erstwhile commissar, believe in the inevitable advance of the Enlightenment, in the coming full fruition of Reason, in Internationalism, Socialism, Justice. Their provenance has something to do with that. They belong to a Budapest generation, born in the Eighteen-Eighties, who revolted against, or at last who broke away from the middle-class and, yes, often stuffy and hypocritical ideas of their cautious and orderly parents craving respectability. And now it is only two years after 1917, a peak period, with many revolutions around the corner: they believe that the world is lurching toward their ideas, everywhere. They are wrong. The coming prophets and leaders, the real revolutionaries are Mussolini and Hitler. And others of that new kind. What will soon matter, what already in 1919 matters is not class-consciousness but national consciousness; a new populism not at all of the Left, which has been losing its monopoly of The People. These three think that the nationalists and the conservatives are reactionary remnants, nothing else. Wrong again. One more thing: anti-reactionary they may be, but they are not honestly populist—in their own ways, all three of them think of themselves as being in the vanguard of progress, qualified leaders of people in a coming world...

"But they aren't heroes, are they? They are survivors in 1919—of their personal destinies as much as of their failed ideas. There is a connection between those two matters, you know."

That will catch up with them soon. In different ways, of course. The Escapee will return to New York, having failed to parlay his few hundred dollars into a fortune in Vienna, but then he will resume his career as a director of a photograph studio in Manhattan, he will marry one of his models, he will become fairly prosperous and Americanized, buying a summer cottage on a lake in New Jersey by 1929, taking up fishing, seeing few Hungarians. He interests me the least. The Refugee Intellectual will realize, at the latest about 1927, that his earlier ideas were full of holes; he will become a conservative and a Catholic, writing thoughtful essays, working in the Vienna office of a big Berlin publisher, moving to Italy or Switzerland after Hitler comes to power and dying there, alone, after ten or fifteen years of honest ulcers, honest religion, and an honest marriage. The Fugitive will worm his way through Ellis Island, become a not unimportant member in the Communist Party of the U.S.A., evading investigations by the Immigration and Naturalization Service, a success among the comrades in New York, not only because of his reputation of having once been a real Commissar in a real Communist government but because of his Budapest worldliness that the New York comrades take for savoir-faire. An almost legendary figure in those conventicles of the Twenties that include a handful of Communist emigrés from Hungary, among them the owner of a good book-shop (close enough to be frequented by the staff of *The New Yorker*) whose plump young wife (a former Budapest chanteuse) the former commissar will regularly bed. Meanwhile, he will be pleasurably involved with people from the Village, until about 1935 his job becomes more serious, passing a few papers to and from amateur comrades of the Hiss type ...

"Now wait a moment. There *was* such a Hungarian Communist personage in New York, by the name of József Pogány ..."

Yes. I was thinking of that man, but *only* because of his *name*. "Pogány" is "pagan" in Hungarian; and I was also thinking of that little Twenties' arts-and-lit magazine in New York, with its silly name: *Pagany*. Meaning "pagandom". *Pagany:* an Avant-Garde of Art and Thought and Society. Trotsky would have liked it. (Perhaps someone in the Village sent him a subscription—once he was out of Russia, in Mexico). In any event, by the Twenties the Village Atheists have acquired *locus* in America. Friends and subscribers of *Pagany*; friends and comrades of Pogány. But that is another topic, even though material for vignettes about Period People.

"Well, this is far from being one of your best vignettes, but let it go."

1948

At three o'clock on a beautiful September afternoon in the principal city of Transylvania it is very warm but the air is dry, there is a soft steady little breeze flowing valleywards from the mountains, so that it is cool in the shadows

of the great plane trees. The clock in the nearby church tower is broken, but a church bell is striking somewhere. Outside the principal hotel and its restaurant a father says good-bye, wistfully, to his ten-year-old daughter. In her blue school uniform, prim and innocent, wearing her blue apron and white blouse, the little girl is going back to her school. She had received permission to take the lunch hour (more: in this instance two hours) off, to be with her father who has just given her a last kiss and then a, somewhat unsure, pat on her thin little back. He is a middle-aged man, getting somewhat corpulent, and with prematurely accumulating bags under his eyes. Otherwise he is different from other fathers in his town. He is older than many of these fathers, and his clothes are better, he wears an American-made summer suit and a silk bow tie, and he has his large Buick automobile at the curb a few steps away; he looks at it, hesitates for a moment, and then chooses to go back to his nearby lodgings on foot. As he starts walking away, his back is slightly bent: for he is weighed down by a terrible presentiment that is more than a premonition, by a suddenly apparent sense of a now unavoidable tragedy of his life.

Here is the story of that life. It is a twentieth-century life, because he was born in 1900, because his life was circumscribed and governed by the two world wars, and because it was circumscribed by the ideas and governed by the mentality of a twentieth-century Central European intellectual. But these categories are too imprecise, a more adequate description is necessary: "Central European" covers multitudes, and he is Hungarian, born and brought up, moreover, in Transylvania, which belongs to Romania now; and though he is Hungarian, he is an American citizen. "Intellectual" covers multitudes, too; again, it is perhaps only in America that he would be recognized thus, since he is not an academic, not a professional intellectual, but a man who has been an artist and an art critic and a script-writer and a novelist at various times in his life. There are many such men who were recognizable characters in certain coffeehouses in Berlin, Paris, London, New York, Rio, men with quick minds, rapidly darting eyes, some wit; superficial rather than shallow, many languages, much (though not always well-digested) memory. At best, the Koestler, and not the Conrad type, if you know what I mean; and at worst—well, you know... This man is not among the worst: his judgments have often been wanting, but then they are compounded by the sentimental inclinations of his heart.

At eighteen he was a radical, a modernist, an atheist, in what was still old Hungary within the Dual Monarchy. When he was nineteen, the radical and the Communist regimes had collapsed, and official Hungary became conservative and counterrevolutionary. At twenty he discovered that he could paint. At twenty-two he could no longer depend on his mother (I don't know what had happened to his father, and he was not so unscrupulous as to be like the man about whom Shaw once wrote that while he did not throw himself into the struggle of life he threw his mother into it). At twenty-three he was an art critic, and not too

bad at it; but that was no way to make a living, and he had developed a few tastes for the better things in life. At twenty-five he was in Paris, actually painting and selling some of his paintings—uncategorizable, like certain Hungarian straw-colored wines—with elements of French post-impressionism and of German expressionism, but also with a Hungarian overlay of bold colours and daring proportions, more than pastiches. He was twenty-six when he met K. in Paris and impressed him, to the extent that K. once lent him money which he partially (but only partially) repaid; he also stole a girl that K. liked. At twenty-eight he was in Berlin, sitting at the "Romanisches Café", finding himself at home in the argle-bargle of all kinds of Central and Eastern European and German intellectuals, painters, photographers, critics, musicians, filmmakers. At thirty he was a set designer for UFA films, which impressed an American representative of Paramount or MGM sufficiently to help him migrate to the United States soon after Hitler came to power. By that time he knew English well enough to write it. But he did not like Hollywood. And he was not taken up by any of the important New York galleries, while life *à la bohème,* in a garret in Greenwich Village, did not attract him. Yet he was found to be attractive enough by a temporary inhabitant of Greenwich Village, a handsome American girl, fleeing from Boston, with some money of her own. They married. They had a daughter. That marriage improved his lot; with his wife's help he met a few well-situated editors and publishers; he resumed his erstwhile career as an art critic, now writing in English, where his occasional grammatical and syntactical errors were easily corrected and amply compensated by the impressive cultural references to names and places and works he would stuff into his columns. He was, however, enough of a Central European intellectual to be inspired by political ideologies. He wrote about politics, too, in *The Nation* and *The New Republic,* articles against the prevalence of Feudalism and Reaction and Fascism in Hungary and in Central Europe; though not a Communist, he was something of a fellow-traveller but he was not altogether a fraud. He volunteered for the Army at the age of forty-two, and got some kind of a counterintelligence assignment. He was never in combat but in 1945 he was able to make a short visit to Hungary and Transylvania in his American uniform. He found some of his friends there still, but most of his family was gone.

By that time he and his American wife had divorced. He had ceased loving her, she did not love him either (mostly, though not exclusively, because of his infidelities). Yet he was a good and devoted father, insisting in the divorce settlement that if his former wife were to remarry he would get custody of the daughter. That happened in 1945. Returning to New York, he thought that ahead of him stretched the prospects of a successful career; that writing would allow him to establish a safe and good upbringing for his child. His mentality, you see, was split. On one side of his *persona* was the European intellectual, the Artist, the Writer, the Radical, contemptuous of American capitalism and of conformism

and of the coagulation of a popular and political anti-Communist ideology soon after the war. The other side was his rejection of how Americans brought up, or did not bring up, their adolescent children. There was something within him (perhaps a nostalgia? or a desire for something that he himself had not experienced), a wish to be a dependable and protective and caring and respected father. But his designs did not come about. His great (or, I should rather say, large) novel was published in 1946, with no *éclat* and little financial success. Critics on whom he had counted criticized the political and ideological machinery clanking through his bumpy prose, that is, when they did not ignore his book altogether.

Late in 1946 he met the cultural attaché of the Romanian legation in Washington. This man, a fellow-traveller, a Francophile and a former poet, suggested that there would be a place for him in the new Transylvania, that he could write there, and live there very well on American money, including the small trust fund that his wife had set up for the daughter's education; he could take all of his belongings with him, including his car. He was fool enough to consider that prospect. He intoxicated his imagination with potent and dangerous draughts of self-generated memories, self-coloured reminiscences from those two or three weeks in 1945: of that Transylvanian town, undamaged by the war, the respect and the adulation with which he had been treated by men and women in virtue of his Americanness, the offers and the availability of spacious apartments and of good spicy food, the plane trees and the one-storied houses breathing the old country air—all of these things overlaid with the, he thought, reasonable conditions extant in the institutions of a new regime: democratic, progressive, socialist. In his youth he had been an indifferent and rebellious student, but now he was impressed with the seriousness of schools in Transylvania, where Latin was still being taught and where he had seen a row of well-behaved young girls in their white blouses and blue aprons. "Ah, your pupils! It is like *le vieux monde*," he said once to their Romanian school teacher. *"Vous pensez, monsieur?"* she said—and he thought that he had complimented her.

He had made up his mind, he told his friends and informed his ex-wife, who was not easy to convince, anxious and worried as she was about her daughter, though not enough to exact more than a promise that she would never relinquish her American citizenship and return to the United States for her college education. He sailed on a French ship with his little American daughter and his big American car in September 1947, driving across Europe with the necessary sheaf of papers and visas, staying for a week in Paris and then for another week in Budapest, all in all a three-week journey across a divided and dividing continent that was less pleasant and here and there more troublesome than he had anticipated. The cold war had begun to crystallize, the phrase "Iron Curtain" was already current, though the wire fences and the watchtowers were not yet erect-

ed; there were some people in Paris, and especially in Budapest, who thought that he was moving in the wrong direction, that he had wrong ideas about what was happening and about what was going to happen, and on one or two occasions a few of them even said so. He thought that they were wrong, but he did not blame them for that. Once they arrived in his native town, almost everything went well, including the apartment he secured almost immediately, large, white-washed rooms with high ceilings and large French windows, "for pennies," as he wrote in his first letters to his American friends.

And now it is mid-September in 1948, and he and his daughter have had a long lunch in the restaurant of the best—the only old and reputed and reliable—hotel of the city. But, together with many other things in the town it, too, has deteriorated, and I do not only mean the list of many dishes pencilled out of the menu but the entire atmosphere that had become vacant and gloomy, in spite of the sun pouring through the plate-glass windows. And the regime in Bucharest has declared exchange regulations that are about to constrict his financial freedoms meaning the easy and commodious use of his American dollars, including the unvexed receipt of his monthly checks transmitted from New York, the availability and the value of which the Romanian Legation in Washington had guaranteed to be secure. And that poet-diplomat himself had been recalled from Washington, and then disappeared. And a month ago he received a certified letter from the central police office, telling him that he must re-register his Buick and pay a large fee, after which he received a gasoline ration allotment that would allow him to drive hardly more than two hundred miles each month. And some of his new local friends, including the young woman who elected to be his mistress almost instantly upon his arrival the year before (when he and his car were wondrous appearances in the town, seen and known by everyone) were becoming warier and warier, including one who would on occasion evade him in public, on the streets. And one of his confidants, a Jew, also an American citizen, told him only a week or so before that he could no longer handle the trading of his dollars on the black market, and that he ought to go to the American Legation in Bucharest and register there, after which he should hide his American passport in a safe place. He did not go to Bucharest but he did pay the required six-month call at the Alien Registration Bureau of the town where, for the first time, he was kept waiting for more than an hour; and then he was called to a different office within the building where behind the desk sat a new, youngish official with an unpleasant face, relentlessly smiling, malevolent, and full of a sense of his obvious power. "You are an American citizen," the man said, asking for the passport, which he then stamped, reducing the interval between registrations to every sixty days. "You were born here, I see." "Yes, here in Romania." That unceasing smile now broadened into a malignant grin. "Yes, but you are a Hungarian", the man said. "When this passport expires you need not go to Bucharest. You will get a new set of identity papers." When he recounted

this interview to the Jewish man, the latter asked: "Did they take your passport away?" "Oh, no" he said. "Watch out. They might." There was a dark little smile on the Jewish man's face, both cynical and commiserating.

So in September 1948 our man senses that ominous things are happening, closing in around him; that his American suit, the shroud of his Americanness, the security due to his American citizenship was thinning and shredding fast; that he had made a great and tragic mistake. But now, on the sun-baked sidewalk in front of the hotel, he thinks only of his daughter. A great wave of sadness, compounded by gratitude and guilt, overcomes him. She had not minded leaving her American friends, she had not minded going to live in a strange world, on a strange continent, in a strange country, with him. Because she loved, because she loves her father. And now: what will become of her? There stretches before him the emptiest afternoon of his entire life, awful and alone in his now so empty rooms, alone with his worries; but while that has weighed down in him all day and the previous night, that is not what fills his mind now; it is when he sees the little girl walking hurriedly across the street that he cannot keep back his tears, he weeps and he weeps.

*

"Did you know such a man?"

No.

"But you can obviously imagine him. Did you know anyone in a similar situation?"

Not really; but I can imagine it.

"Well—with your imagination, I would have liked more description of this Central European Intellectual—say, in New York in 1939. After all, the vignette is about him, and not about his daughter. All right—about his illusions, and their miserable failure; but since you are not writing a treatise about all those Central European intellectuals in Berlin, you have one sentence."

But they have been described so often...

"Mostly by themselves, and by their late sympathizers. You dislike most of them, because you know something about their shortcomings."

Yes, I have little sympathy for that Weimar Berlin intellectual climate, for those people who oddly resembled intellectuals in New York too—who took satisfaction from thinking that they were the intellectuals and artistic avant-garde, knowing something about the superficial pleasures of the world—very much at home in Berlin where there were books to be bandied about, cigarette-smoke, ordering of French cognac, German women with big painted mouth and bobbed hair, and also very loud. In New York they congregated too, in an America which unlike provincial Germany, was not at all hostile to them, which they disdained common people in America as much, if not more, than in Germany...

"Yet you seem to have a definite sympathy for your man."

Not sympathy but compassion. He is alone, awfully alone, because he has condemned himself to be a prisoner, and sooner or later his little girl will be a prisoner of sorts, too—because of him. He knows that.

"I know that compassion and sympathy are not the same, but they do overlap, they cannot be separated entirely, can they? However—what will happen to him and to his daughter after that terrible sunny afternoon?"

I don't know and I don' want to think about it. Still—and not because of compassion—I can assume that they will survive, of course after many troubles, and eventually return to the United States.

"Will your man then write a book in America, an exposé of the cruelties of Communism in Eastern Europe?"

No, because he is not enough of an opportunist, and because he will have become much, much older. And I fear that he will not live long, perhaps because what had gripped his heart that afternoon went so deep, and weakened that heart forever.

1963

"Indian summer this is."

"Oh, no. It's not October yet."

"You're right—but for me it is Indian Summer."

Words spoken by an elegant and still handsome woman, in her late fifties, in a language—Hungarian—where "Indian Summer" is more telling and startling than in English: it is "Old Women's Summer", *"Vénasszonyok nyara."*

"For all of us," another woman says; and around the table everyone laughs, a little.

They sit in beautiful afternoon sunshine. Six of them: two married couples, a widow, a single man, on the terrace of a hotel—a gravel ellipse under summer umbrellas now gathered in, on top of a stony rampart above a lake. The lake is the Worthersee in Austria, in the province of Carinthia, an old and famous Central European summer resort. This is mid-September, and half of the summer visitors and tourists are gone. On the narrow sandy beach on both sides of the terrace there are still a handful of bathers and swimmers. The wavelets of the lake keep lapping against the stones with a chilly monotony. But the sun is strong enough for some of the women to take off their cashmere cardigans and fold them or drape them on the back of their chairs, the breeze from the lake is not strong enough to chill them. The brightness of the air is almost supernatural: the mountains across look closer than they actually are. The lake is dotted with the white flecks of a dozen sailboats and there comes, momentarily, the roar of a motorboat and a water-skier racing in its wake. On a nearby promontory stands a very large villa, with its gardens descending in terraces lined with laurels, roses, yews. The air is so clear that those flowers, too, look closer than they are.

The villa is postwar, and the water-skiing is postwar, but otherwise the scenery is much the same as it was before the war, thirty years ago, or perhaps even earlier. This group of six people know that, and it is one of the reasons they are here. They have been here before, though perhaps not on the same terrace—they have come over here from another hotel, for the pastries and iced coffee, with whipped cream for some of them. That afternoon custom, too, is as it was before. They are survivors. One of the couples fled from Hungary where Communism was about to be imposed, in 1947, the other couple and the widow in 1949, the single man in 1956. They had lived through the war, and the German occupation, and the siege of Budapest, and the Russian conquest of Hungary. Now one couple live in New York, the other couple in Milan, the widow in Vienna, the single gent in Munich. All of them had known each other in Budapest, two of the women were classmates there, and now they are old friends. At least three of them take vacations together each year, the others come every two or three years, having spent weeks and months beforehand writing letters and telephoning each other about where to go and when, to a customary hotel of theirs or to another one? All of them are between fifty-five and sixty-five. The women are well-dressed, two of them rather smart in their imprimé dresses and with their silk scarves and fine shoes, their hair freshly done; the men are heavier and well-dressed too, in a somewhat old-fashioned way, in their linen suits or in a sweater with an ascot tucked in around their necks. A foreigner would find it difficult to classify them, even without hearing their strangely uncategorizable language. Only the Austrians, the hotel personnel and the older ones among the waiters know that they are Hungarians, but not Hungarians from Hungary: Hungarian emigrés.

They look well-heeled, and so they are. Well they have survived everything, or almost everything, except that they have their memories of the people and the lives they lost: the widow's husband beaten by the Communist police and dying ten years later in Vienna because of his hopelessly damaged kidneys; the brother of one of the men killed in a death-camp in Poland (two of the group are half-Jewish); the parents of another deported by the political police and then permitted to return to Budapest where they now live in two cramped rooms. But they have another set of memories, of other people and other lives too, and so their talk is the old high talk of old fashionable Budapest, with its inestimable knowledgeability of human matters. This lends another dimension to the music that murmurs beneath their talk, for each of them hears the sea of the past murmuring close, as if their left hand held a shell out of that sea against their ears, day and night.

"Must I tell you," one of the women says, "that one of the pleasures of friendship is to talk of our own infirmities?" About a common acquaintance: "He is so selfish, not only the way he lives; he is always pushing others to arrange their lives as he wishes them to live." About the divorced daughter of another

acquaintance who is pregnant again, without being married: "She reminds me of Germany," "How?" "After expanding she can't retain her conquests." About New York: the gentleman tells what happened when he had collapsed; in an emergency, he was transported to a big hospital; no one knew whether he had a stroke or a serious heart attack; he was unconscious. "And guess what was the first thing the nurse said when I came to." "What?" "Man, you sure got cloudy urine."

But their conversation gathers speed and seriousness when they turn to the handsome widow. Gossip is thickening into advice. They know that she is being courted by another Hungarian emigre who lives in Switzerland and who keeps inviting her to Leysin or Davos in the summer and to Menton or the Canaries in the winter, and that a month ago he was in Vienna on business, setting up in the Sacher, and asking her to dine with him, which she did. They know him; he is stocky, with a gravelly voice, rich, perhaps a *bit* vulgar; but he has, after all, placed himself in the very midst of rich life, there are all those rich hotels and resorts and restaurants where he makes sure that he is known, and there is that rich apartment of his in Geneva. "Quite overdone, *üppig",* the widow says, in German. "He showed me his collection of emeralds. Stunning, but I think he collects them for investment, business, *G'schäft",* she says, again, with a slightly contemptuous Viennese pronunciation. "Vera!" her best friend stops her. "He talked about you to us in Milan, all the time. He took us out to dinner, and to the Savini..." "Yes, because you had got him a ticket to the Scala." "Stop it. He is all *Feuer und Flamme* about you." *Feuer und Flamme:* "Fire and Flame"—they throw a few such German phrases into their talk, not because they find themselves in Austria, but because that was another old Budapest custom too. Vera smiles, quite contented, but she also shrugs her shoulder a little. They know her and love her and are convinced that marrying that man is what she ought to do, what she must do now, on the cusp of the autumn of her life. They know all about her, her virtues and her missteps (if that is what they were), including the fact that for two years she had a sad and rather hopeless love affair with a younger man who had fled from Budapest to Vienna after the 1956 Rising; and also that many years ago one of the married men in the group had been in love with her, though they are sure (especially the women) that she has got no one now (but, as the men say among themselves, walking back to the hotel, one never knows.)

However, what they know about her, what she did do and what she will do does not belong to this vignette. What belongs to this vignette is their survivorship. Great chunks of their lives had been amputated, all of them are maimed, in one way or another—but are they maimed worse than are unhappy women or men of a corresponding class of people, say, in England or America? More, yes; worse, no. Their wounds are deeper but they heal better. The Muses are the daughters of Memory, but these people know how to govern their memories;

they are the orphaned children but the orphaned fathers and mothers, too, of their memories. And they know *where* they are. In the midst of Indian Summer, that is. They are like all Hungarians, congenital pessimists; but here they sit, in the still warm September sun, having *Eiskaffee, mit Schlag* on the Wörthersee, talking to each other in 1963 *à la* 1936. They all live a little beyond their means ("if I could only afford to live the way I live," one of them says), which is very Hungarian, too, and the six of them have a total of four children, which is very bourgeois, and they know that they will not live much longer and then rest (rest? if that is the word) in alien cemeteries; but now their flesh and their souls are warmed by this Indian Summer; and perhaps they know that this is not only *their* Indian Summer, it is the Indian Summer of Europe, more, the Indian Summer of Western civilization, of the only civilization that they know—and that we know.

*

"I know that you know those people very well, and that you are fond of some of them; but we are concerned with history, aren't we? I fear that you are overdoing that Indian Summer bit. The Indian Summer of Europe—or, at that, of Western civilization—were the years before 1914."

Of course. But this is something else: it is the Indian Summer of Indian Summer, the sun having come out for a few years, that's all. They are in the midst of the recovery of their lives, including some of their comforts and standards. That of course can happen anywhere, any time. But they are also in the midst of the recovery of Western Europe after the war, as a matter of fact, near its ephemeral peak. Incidentally, they know that. On that particular afternoon they do not talk much about politics, but they all agree—wrongly—that the United Europe is coming; as one of the men says, "that can no longer be reversed", and of course they are all in favour of a Union of Europe. It did not happen that way, and perhaps it will never happen, but that is something we know in 1993 when, I fear, most of them will be dead. However, there is one thing I want to say. Having been cosmopolitan Hungarians, the desire and love for Europeanness was bred into them. And, unlike some Western Europeans, they are very pro-American too. Because of many reasons: America the leader, the hope of the free world, etc., etc. They understand little about American politics and American tendencies—including the couple who live in New York. Perhaps they like America for the wrong reasons. But they know that this recovery of Europe after the war, this restoration, was largely due to American generosity and to the American example.

"Very nice; but that prosperity includes things that they do not and cannot like very much. All those crowds of tourists. The rise of the proletariat. Giving credit to the masses—that was the American achievement. After the war the Europeans have thought it best to emulate it: the welfare state, instalment buying, and soon the credit cards. The lower classes first merging into and then

submerging of what were the middle classes once. All polls and popularity contents and television. Well, it is usually you, not I, who keeps worrying about where this will lead, where it has already led, whether it has been any good."

Let's not think about the results. What I was trying to suggest was that there was this little Indian Summer after the big Indian Summer, in Western Europe for about ten years, say 1958 to 1968; and that these people, not Western Europeans by birth but refugees and survivors, knew it perhaps better than any other people. And they are blessed thus, but perhaps they do not know that.

"Spare me your apocalyptics, and tell me just one more thing. What happened to Vera, and to Fire and Flame"?

Reader, she did *not* marry him.

"It's 'Reader, I married him.' " You have your *Jane Eyre* wrong.

Well, she did not marry him, but not because he wouldn't know Jane Eyre, or Strindberg from Schnitzler. He was not civilized enough.

"But I feel, and perhaps you suggest, that she had slept with him once, perhaps in Vienna, or how would she know about his apartment in Geneva?"

I am afraid that this must have been so, and I will admit that this would not have been taken so lightly either by her or by her kind of people fifty years before, which is why I insist that this was an Indian Summer after the real Indian Summer...

"There is, however, one good thing to say for this century, and you know what it is. In 1963 this woman, in her late fifties, is attractive, indeed, she is still sexually desirable. Wouldn't have happened in 1893."

Good point, but doesn't belong here. ❧

Károly Méhes

A Book of Cakes

From the Secret Recipe Book of a Transylvanian Woman

(Short story)

Passion Meringues!

Beat 140 grammes vanilla-flavoured castor sugar with the whites of three eggs, add 140 grammes walnuts, left whole. Place the bowl into a pan of gently boiling water and cook until the juice of the walnuts has evaporated. Place tiny heaps of the meringue mixture onto a greased baking sheet and leave to dry. They dry very quickly!

Kraszna, Seventh of November, 1918

Today, despite the piercing cold, the whole party went down to the shore of the lake. The snow that fell the day before yesterday has for the most part melted, but this new spell of cold weather has hardened, frozen what was left of it. Everything was as brittle as glass, the branches we touched, the leaves crackling underfoot, the thin coat of ice on the puddles. When we reached the shore Károly said that if this hard weather held, the lake would soon be frozen over and we'd have the skating-sledges out again! Yes. I glanced across the lake to the other side; to the little wooden shack where they hire out skating-sledges, of course it hasn't been opened yet. But last winter the place was bustling, lively, especially after the New Year's ball, in January. Behind the shack, in the woods so dense and dark they seemed almost black, I could swear I saw the thick-trunked oak against which Béla Sándor pushed me and kissed me, pinning down the hands I raised in feeble defence. His mouth burned like fire. He did not say a word, just kissed me. Then I made out that I had to go, though I am sure I should have stayed! And he never said a word, just let go of my hands, and let me slip out from between his arms and the trunk—I did not turn round, I could feel his gaze warming my back so!

He spent the rest of the day drinking with the men, got quite drunk on mulled wine; the snowbound

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countryside resounded with their raucous laughter. It was only later in the afternoon, when it was getting dark, that Mici got up the courage to tell me what everyone else had already known, that Béla Sándor had made a bet with the boys, sometime before the New Year's ball, that he'd kiss every girl before the carnival dance! You were the last, said that stupid Mici, sniggering, but he pulled it off, didn't he!

I was the last. I haven't the heart to go skate-sledging again, not this winter either.

Wartime Chestnut Cake!

Beat the yolks of six eggs with 400 grammes vanilla-flavoured sugar. Add a little grated lemon-peel, 100 grammes ground walnuts, 500 grammes baked potatoes passed through a sieve, and the whites of six eggs, beaten stiff. Divide into three portions and bake each layer separately in a greased cake-tin. Filling: Mix 120 grammes ground walnuts with a few spoonfuls of hot milk, stir until it thickens to a soft paste. When cool, add 120 grammes of sugar and 120 grammes butter and continue to stir for half an hour. Spread this mixture over the layers and the top and sides of the cake as well. Sprinkle with ground walnuts mixed with sugar.

Kraszna, Eighth of November 1918

We were sitting down to lunch when a servant-girl came running across the square, screaming that the Romanians were here! Well, this proved to be the truth, so much so that by night-time there was a Romanian captain resting in Daddy's and Mummy's bed with his booted feet up on the footboard, and his batman sitting in the kitchen, a pious lad, for he drew a tiny Bible out of his pocket and began reading it aloud, mumbling to himself in an undertone, in Romanian, of course, so we did not understand a word. We just sat around the table, totally taken aback, staring at him, as at some unearthly apparition.

The next day the horrors continued. When I went into the room to clear the breakfast table, what did I see but our billeted soldier with his foot up on the arm of the chair, polishing his boots with our precious silk curtains! Seriously, I almost cried. And he, taking advantage of my helplessness, seeing as I was holding the loaded tray with both hands, took hold of my chin with two fingers, and forced my face towards his. I expected something terrible would happen, that he would want to kiss me, or worse, but he just asked me—in impeccable German, by the bye—to make him some kind of dessert for lunch, chestnut cake if possible, as that was his favourite.

Dear God, what kind of chestnut cake could you make in war-time! Impossible! I worked on it all day. Of course it didn't come close to what it

should have been like, but what can you expect, chestnuts can't be had for love or money these days, we can count ourselves lucky to get potatoes!

He ate almost all of the cake anyway, sending just a thin slice to the batman in the kitchen. There was a toothpick drooping from the corner of his mouth when I went in to clear the table, but he whipped it out when I stepped in. He stood up, nodding several times to show that he was satisfied with our wartime chestnut cake.

Suddenly, a feeling of contentment warmed my heart: I had given pleasure to this tired-looking, dark-eyed young man; what's it to me if he happens to be the enemy?

And then, as he strolled over to the window to stand with his back to me, what did I see but the little silver-handled brush we use for sweeping the crumbs off the table sticking out of the leg of his boot!

This war is such a terrible affair!

Baronial Pancakes!

Beat the yolks of six eggs, 60 grammes castor sugar and 60 grammes butter to a cream, add 400 ml milk, 60 grammes flour and the whites of six eggs, beaten stiff. Begin frying at once, but do not turn over when one side is done, just slip the pancake onto a plate with the uncooked side up, and sprinkle with ground walnuts. Continue adding layers until the batter is all gone. Sprinkle the top pancake as well. Best eaten hot!

Kraszna, Second of March, 1919

Today I am very sad.

They say every girl dreams of getting married, and the sooner the better. Well, I don't! I am only nineteen years old, and in these hard times Mummy and Daddy need me. And I them.

Ever since the New Year, Teofil Szapáry has become a regular visitor to our house, supposedly to play chess with Daddy, but if that's so I just don't know why and especially how he contrives, in these terrible times we're living in, and in the dead of winter at that, to arrive with twenty-five white and red roses every time? They're not for Mummy, a deep bow and the most humble of hand-kisses is her due, but for me. Why does he do it? And I had to sit there, in the single room that is left to us, and watch the gentlemen not play chess after all, because all this Teofil Szapáry did was stare at me all the time, while Daddy picked off his queen and rooks and knights one after the other, and checkmated him any number of times in a row!

You have to know that fate has not been kind to "poor" Teofil Szapáry; as a young man he was wounded in a duel, shot in the ankle, and he walks with a limp to this day. As well as that, he has buried two wives and five children,

which really is a tragedy. He has lost most of his property through the war-loans, and has now retired to the plain nearby where he has a manor house, for many years left unattended and fallen into disrepair. They say he spent the winter dropping in on people every evening, as there is no proper heating in his house. He is at least sixty if a day, wrinkled, bald and with a pot-belly. His eyes are cloudy, purplish almost, like when you put permanganate of potash into a basin of water.

And today he proposed to me. I refused him.

What really distressed me was that Daddy promised me to him without asking me first. Like a horse.

What's the good of having someone "love" you who shouldn't, when those whose hearts should tell them to love you do not?

Simple Corncake!

Beat together the yolks of seven eggs, 250 grammes sugar and the juice and grated rind of a lemon, stir in the whites of the eggs beaten stiff, and 120 grammes cornflour sifted through a fine sieve. Divide into two portions and bake separately. Prepare the following filling: mix a small plateful of ground walnuts with a large spoonful of castor sugar, then keep adding sweet cream and stir until smooth. Spread over one layer of the corncake and place the other on top!

Kraszna, Twentieth of March, 1920.

They have buried Gyuszika—I can't help it, I can't call him by any other name. I did not go to the cemetery.

I hadn't seen him for a long time when we met again last autumn. He'd always been a bit simple, even as a boy. He never could catch anybody when we were playing tag, and if we played hide-and-seek he was sure to be the seeker for the whole of the day. They say he served on the Galician front, was shell-shocked and lost his hearing. He was hospitalized for a long time, then shuttled to and fro until he finally found his way home. He went back to his father's haberdashery, I used to see him there almost every day.

Well, if he used to be a dummy, he'd now become deaf and dumb for real, poor man. Since he couldn't hear, he hardly ever spoke, even though he could have, if he wanted. He just stared at you with those dark, coal-black eyes so hard his gaze almost hurt.

Whenever he caught sight of me he'd leap to serve me, and, as a mark of special distinction, would force out a Young Madam! between his teeth—what foolishness! I would give him my shopping list and Gyuszika would spring from shelf to shelf, moving stiffly, gawkily, and pile everything up before me on the counter. He never smiled as he did this, as tradesmen usually do, but went about

his business with a kind of determined and—or so I felt—expectant expression on his face, as though awaiting praise.

On one occasion he slung the bar of scrubbing soap on the counter with such vigour that it slid off and fell to the floor. He threw himself after it like a madman, leaning precariously over the wooden counter, but I, who was standing on the right side of the counter, proved faster and picked it up. In his confusion, a strange guttural cry escaped from his throat, then he straightened up. I had to smile at this, and with my arm extended, handed him the soap so he could put it with the other things. But Gyuszika kept staring at me as he reached for the soap and so took hold of my hand instead. His palm was rough, like a rasp, and cold. He kept hold of my hand, still holding the soap, and I felt his grip grow tighter and tighter until it became quite unpleasant, even painful. I firmly pulled my hand out of his grasp and placed the soap on the counter. I hadn't the heart to be really angry with him, but for a moment I thought, well, well, perhaps he isn't such a simpleton as he seems?

How things stood became quite clear the following day. Gyuszika threw every item on my shopping list forcefully before me on the floor. His eyes gleamed blackly, his mouth hung half open. He hoped, poor creature, that I would pick every object up, one by one, and hand them over to him, extending my hand of course, so he could clutch it to his heart's content. Nothing doing.

That someone should hang himself with the chain of the draw-well, as Gyuszika did, was simply unheard of. It was his father who found him one frosty morning. Now everyone is saying that the simple-minded lad had hung himself because of me, because I led him on. Ridiculous. I hadn't even set foot in the shop for weeks. They're saying now that Gyuszika might have been a simpleton, but he did have a heart, and wasn't it unfair to make a fool of his heart as well?

All I did was reach for the scrubbing-soap.

Jubilee Cake!

Cream together 140 grammes sugar, the yolks of 7 eggs and one and a half bars of fine chocolate in a dish and stir for half an hour. Beat the whites of the eggs and add to the creamed mixture with 100 grammes flour, then bake in a greased cake-tin. When it has cooled, cut crosswise into three neat layers. For the mocca creme filling: Cream together 6 tablespoonfuls castor sugar, 4 tablespoonfuls milk, 6 tablespoonfuls strong black coffee and four whole eggs in a whisking bowl, place for a couple of minutes over gently simmering water, stirring with an egg whisk all the while, then leave to cool. Now cream 150 grammes butter and blend with the mixture until it is smooth and frothy. Spread the mixture over the layers and the top and sides of the cake, then sprinkle with 200 grammes chopped roasted hazelnuts.

Kraszna, Twenty-ninth of July, 1922

I begged Mummy and Daddy for us to spend this wonderful evening, their 25th wedding anniversary, together, just the three of us, since poor dear grandmamma didn't live to see this day, and not invite any guests. They say they had a wonderful day for their wedding, back in 1897, they'd been having an oppressively hot spell and the rain that fell before the ceremony was very welcome; it broke up the sultry weather and made everything fresh and fragrant, almost excessively so. One of the bridesmaids stepped on Mummy's veil, and they came close to falling, both of them; Mummy says she could have slapped her then, she was so vexed, but today the memory makes her laugh, then suddenly she recalls, saddened, that the husband of that Jolán (the bridesmaid) was killed in battle, and that she fled to Hungary with her four children, where they're now living in Makó in abject poverty

Daddy gave a great sigh this morning as he tore yesterday's page off the small kitchen calendar. The war began eight years ago, he said, and it was not that another day had gone by, nor the passing of days that he regretted, but that that one day had to happen.

And so it went on all day. The dish slipped from between my hands and a large portion of the chocolate spattered the wall we had whitewashed this spring. We were sitting down to lunch when we heard these terrible growls, barks, then whines coming from the yard. A big white stray dog had come in through the garden and given our little Flóris a good going over; he was still trailing his right foreleg in the afternoon, and a bit of his left ear is missing.

Fortunately, supper-time was spent in peace. At my request, as always, they related the exact events of that bygone day. But today it was Mummy who spoke more, Daddy was silent, withdrawn, I'd noticed that he'd drunk rather a lot of wine.

Finally, he put a record on the gramophone and sat me in his lap, the way he used to do when I was small. We sat like that for a little while, listening to the music. Then, from directly behind my ear, I heard Daddy's voice say:

"It's you I'm worried about, my little Edit, always. I pray for you every night, pray for you to find a decent, honest husband, and that you'll love each other. You're not alone yet, but will be soon. An adult doesn't have parents, just the memory of two distant, cherished faces in his heart. That's right. You must marry, and then you'll be able to live happily, as your mother and I do!"

I couldn't stand it any longer, and jumped up. And then I saw that their eyes were brimming with tears. I knew they were mourning for me.

Ruffle Cake!

Beat together the whites of six eggs with 180 grammes sugar until stiff. Blend with the yolks of six eggs, the juice and rind of half a lemon, and 100 grammes flour. Divide into three and bake separately in three layers. Filling: beat together a quarter of a litre milk, two tablespoonfuls flour, 180

grammes butter and 180 grammes vanilla-flavoured castor sugar until creamy and frothy. Fill the layers with this mixture and spread over the top and sides of the cake as well. Brown 70 grammes coarse sugar with 70 grammes almonds and sprinkle over the cake.

Kraszna, Fifteenth of December, 1929

It is bitterly cold. But I can't sit at home all day. I walked out over the frozen snow into the cemetery. I barely managed to clamber up to the plot enclosed by wrought iron railings. The black obelisk standing on my grandparents' grave was covered in snow, frozen in such a strange way as to make it seem like black death itself, shrouded in white; it gave me the shivers. Then I made my way towards the brook, to the place where we used to go skate-sledging. How I wish I hadn't! I don't know why, but I did not expect to see people skate-sledging there, just the way they used to in our time. Girls ten years younger than myself, modern girls, some of them in trousers, no less, and a lot of them on skates, which is much more fashionable these days, and more daring too! The little wooden hut is still there, its chimney smoking merrily, and they're probably still mulling wine inside, like they used to in the old days. I did not venture nearer, but turned back towards the woods, from where, passing round huge fallen branches and mounds of packed, frozen snow, it was only with great difficulty that I managed to drag myself out to the road.

Because of the excruciating back ache I've been having since autumn, and at Mummy's incessant urging, I finally travelled to Zilah to see the famous Doctor Kobrizsa, who hemmed and hawed, tapped my back, made me lie on my stomach, then my back, and at last advised me to go to Szováta or Borszék for the waters, the sooner the better.

I was standing in the doorway in my overcoat when he asked me, somewhat embarrassedly, how old I was. I took two years off my age. Upon which he said, anxiously shaking his head, but the young lady is so young!

Sad to say, that's not how I feel.

Then today, coming back from my walk, I heard Mummy and her godmother, old Auntie Ilonka, closeted in the kitchen and whispering— about me!

"The doctor told us that she's hunchbacked, poor darling! Of course he never said a word to her, just told her to go to a spa. But he confessed that no kind of medicinal water would really prove much help, once the vertebrae begin to collapse, there's nothing to be done."

"So that's why she walks so stooped", responded Auntie Ilonka. "I noticed that Editke's back was getting more and more crooked, but I thought it was these failing eyes of mine playing tricks!"

"Heaven help us," said Mummy, crying softly, "what are we going to do now?"

I just stood rooted until the round-handled umbrella dropped from my hand with a loud clank upon which rapid rustling sounds began to issue from the kitchen, and I heard Auntie Ilonka say, in an overloud voice:

"Well, here's that recipe for ruffle cake, dear! Don't forget to show it to Editke, you know she likes to write them down in her recipe book!"

Floating Islands!

Take 250 grammes sugar, brown half of it, add a little water and leave to cool. Blend the other half with the yolks of 5–6 eggs. Mix together and stir over a gentle heat, dribble in one litre of milk , and at the end one tablespoonful flour. Beat the egg whites until stiff, add a little sugar, and slide them on top to make the floating islands.

Kraszna, Ninth of October, 1932

What happened was that nothing happened. Yet I'd made such preparations!

It was still summer when a letter came from Budapest, and great heavens, written by none other than my old schoolfriend from Zilah, little Lili Heténvi! I say "little" Lili as I haven't seen her for almost twenty years, but it seems that, just as I have retained fond memories of her, so she must have done of me, since she wants to see me sometime during this trip home.

Strange how old memories seem to gain importance if there are no new ones to take their place! This Lili Heténvi was one of those frolicsome, plump, red-haired, freckle-faced girls, my exact opposite to tell the truth, but perhaps that is what attracted us to each other. She loved to recite, to sing, so no one was surprised when she was given a part in the theatre (especially since her father was the town clerk, but of course at the time, children that we were then, none of us knew that something like that could count, everybody had a father of some kind). They were playing Little Lord Fauntleroy, in which she acted very well, a sight for sore eyes, she was, with those round, rosy cheeks, as she rattled off her part.

Who could have guessed then that she'd really become an actress, and a beautiful, celebrated actress at that! Of course, I haven't seen her since then, on stage nor elsewhere, and we exchanged letters only twice or thrice in the years after we left school, while she was studying at Nagyvárad.

She sent me a postcard of the Fishermen's Bastion, informing me that she was returning home in the company of her husband, Aurél Acsády, the composer (I've never heard of him, but that's probably my fault) and seeing that she'd be in the neighbourhood, she'd drop in to see me on Thursday, to revive the memory of those good old days.

I sent for the hairdresser the day before, and was so glad of an occasion to wear my beautiful violet dress that the dressmaker's just altered at the shoulder and waist (though the thought did cross my mind: what was I trying to do, outdue an actress from Budapest in elegance?)

I quickly whipped up a simple dessert, I'd tried these floating islands once before, on Daddy's last name-day, and it turned out splendidly. Then I sat and

waited. Or rather, did not sit but walked up and down, kept running out to the door every time I heard it slam, but nothing.

By six o'clock, when the little islands of whipped egg-white had soaked up all the liquid and sunk into the cream, I knew they weren't coming.

I sat alone, like a floating island, stiff as a rod in the middle of the cold and dark room. And I can't even swim! And sinking you dont have to learn, it happens all by itself.

Non Plus Ultra Moons!

250 grammes flour, 70 grammes castor sugar, the yolks of three eggs, 200 grammes butter, a little sour cream, bicarbonate of soda, vanilla; knead all the ingredients together on a pastry-board, roll out thinly, and cut into moon shapes. Beat the whipped whites of three eggs with 250 grammes vanilla-flavoured castor sugar until stiff. Place small mounds on the top of the moons and bake at low heat.

Kraszna, Twenty-first of May, 1938

My first birthday completely alone, now that Mummy too has gone. Strange how, in those last days, in a feverish trance, she kept asking me to take the old wall-clock to be repaired at all costs, it had been part of her trousseau, I was to take good care of it. Yet there had been nothing wrong with the clock. Then, on the day of her death—I remember exactly—with all the things that had to be done, I simply did not have the strength for the automatic gesture of winding up the clock, and it stopped. And it's going to stay that way, I've decided, preserving the time when Mummy was still alive. For one, I have no need to know the time, it makes no difference to me, for the other, I am punctual to the minute in everything I do, in this house I am the only real clock.

The parish priest asked me to embroider a new altar-cloth for Whitsun, I am working on it even now. I sit out on the verandah, on the garden side, make myself comfortable in the wicker chair, with a lot of pillows behind my back for support, and sew. It's so hot one has to believe that summer will soon be here. All around me everything is alive, humming, busy, even at evening-time, like now.

Just look at all the stars, and I lower the altar-cloth into my lap. Why is it that the sky can dazzle and blind one so? And just the one solitary little moon. Why? Why isn't the sky full of little moons, like a gigantic baking-sheet?

And someone would whisper, Editke, I made them for your birthday.

There is no one to say it.

Translated by Eszter Molnár

András Petőcz

A Change of Guard in Writing

Notes on the Poetry of the 1980s

Political and economic changes that took place in the late 80s and early 90s had actually started earlier in the cultural field, particularly in literary life. The first signs appeared in the late 70s, to be followed in the early 80s by the emergence of spectacularly novel trends. Most taboos, naturally, survived, but there was a clear indication that pluralism in literary life was replacing a mostly monolithic set-up. "Monolithic" obviously does not mean "homogeneous", nor does it imply that in pre-1980 Hungary all artistic creation had been cast in the same mould. Yet monolithic is a good description for the structure of literary life and the limits of freedom. Dictatorial cultural policies meant that no groupings were allowed to cristallize around various literary trends, nor were the latter able to start their own journals. Experimental trends were neither tolerated nor published. Authors were shepherded around centrally controlled periodicals edited in what could be described as the spirit of "the People's Front", which manifested itself in the attempts either to confront or wash together representatives of the two major traditional trends—"urbanite" writers who upheld predominantly middle-class values, and the *népi* or "populist" (lit. "of the people") writers whose background was rural. Meanwhile, occasional avant-garde endeavours, e.g. visual poetry or expressionist free verse, were denied publication. This monolithic, "command" literature and literary life broke up in the early 80s. New trends emerged, new series of books could be published and new workshops formed. A new generation had come of age—though the word "generation" in this case is not to be taken strictly since those concerned were aged anything from 20 to 35 at the time. Members of this literary and arts group saw little hope for themselves individually in the future but, realizing the need for common action, they decided to cooperate.

The 80s are therefore eminently important in the literature of the recent past, for the changes that took place at that time laid the foundations for the literary life of our day. Very typically, one of the first such initiatives was taken at the University of Budapest, where some of us started a literary and art

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review, *Jelenlét* (Presence). The political powers classified it as a student paper and as such they did not ban it; indeed, they could not have done so easily at a time when strikes were common in Poland. One of the first privately initiated periodicals, *Jelenlét* presented the latest distinctive literary, artistic and, if only covertly, political endeavours. The period was far from being uneventful—we participated in the student movements demanding an autonomous student forum and independent teaching, and created the "independent peace movement" which, unlike the official peace movement, urged disarmament not only for the US but also for the Soviet Union. The first "samizdat boutiques" opened around 1981, and quite a number of illegal publications were available at the University. We were aware of the tragedy the untimely death of László Nagy meant. His was a peasant background and he had grown into a great poet, and we felt that a period had come to an end. As the giants of the older generation, Illyés, Pilinszky, Weöres, all died, something new was soon to start. And all the while the great poets of the century were looming over us; we were very much aware of the genius of Endre Ady and Attila József and the weight of the review *Nyugat* (1908–1941), whose influence is felt to this day. We also descried the rebellious avant-garde at the beginning of the century and in it Kassák's persistent innovative work. We perceived the significance of the poetry of the American beat generation, Ginsberg, Corso, Ferlinghetti, who became known in the 70s; we knew about rock and pop as a way of life and Woodstock as a symbol, even though very little of the latter had filtered through to us. The 80s, we should not forget, brought great changes which inevitably left their mark on our views. The strikes in Poland made an impact on us; students at the time walked around with Solidarity badges pinned on their lapels, and we travelled to Warsaw and Cracow to get the feel of things. This was the time when we bought our samizdat papers and magazines at László Rajk's apartment in central Budapest, and we heard Allen Ginsberg at the Faculty of Arts. He spoke to us about rock, free verse, the breath of free poetry. It was a time when the József Attila Circle, the youth section of the Writers' Association, was the forum for free political debate, and the idea of a series of publications by its members was being discussed on a growing number of occasions.

The 80s were indeed a momentous period for this generation. We got involved in political matters too, and it was thus natural for us to turn towards the alternate in politics, just as we did in literature and the arts. We sought out trends that were unofficial, unlicensed because we instinctively felt that seeking the different and the multihued in the arts was equivalent to the struggle against homogeneity in politics. There was no shortage of alternative artists or poets in Hungary in the 80s. Their efforts were to be usually described by the umbrella term "avant-garde"—and little did we know at the time the many faces it had. Lajos Kassák, who started writing early in the century, was generally considered an example. His staunchness, his integrity, his eternal protest and dynamic

views of the arts offered themselves as natural ideals and goals. His influence is most clearly felt in the books of those members of this loosely interpreted generation (at the time termed the "faceless" generation) who had started out the earliest—Tibor Zalán, János Géczi—and in my own *Önéletrajzi kísérletek* (Experiments at an Autobiography). This also implies that even though a direct political message was seldom present in our work, the elements of social revolt and the longing for freedom were there in our free verse and visual work. One version of the alternative was expressive, rebellious free verse which, typically of the classical avant-garde, was often conjoined with visual elements. Free verse of this kind had already gained wide acceptance in Hungarian poetry. We may also speak about Hungarian poetry written outside Hungary as well, since there were important poets active and major works born in Hungarian in the neighbouring countries. The Hungarian review and literary workshop *Új Symposion* (New Symposium), published in Novi Sad (Újvidék) in what was then Yugoslavia, a forum for new avant-garde works by excellent authors and artists, had exerted great influence on our generation.

In the varied, restless cavalcade of the early 80s, the real challenge was how to define otherness, which of the new trends were obsolete, *déjà vu* to begin with, and which were genuinely new and alternative. *Új Symposion* in this respect had several different periods in which, at various times and under different political pressures, either the expressive or the "artistic" avant-garde gained predominance. Another significant source of influence for our generation was the review *Magyar Műhely* (Hungarian Workshop), published in Paris. In connection with *Magyar Műhely,* there were avant-garde trends in which social revolt was less accentuated and expressiveness less typical, while shaping was more pronounced and the use of language as material dominated, the emphasis being on concrete poetry. Yet even those in the avant-garde who did not foment direct political goals, mobilizing the faithful to experiment instead, to create works from letters or other visual signs or acoustic works from sounds that could not be decoded on paper, expressed their dissatisfaction with the monolithic political regime by creating unusual, off-beat works; their novelty called attention to the significance of alternative thinking. This followed from the fact that politics permeated literature and cultural life, for in a totalitarian society almost all forms of artistic expression carried some political import.

The Paris review *Magyar Műhely* exerted its influence on the young generation in two ways—on the one hand, by its aesthetic novelty and otherness and, on the other, by being "outside the regime", in other words, it carried no signs of a self-inflicted censorship, since it was edited in total freedom. It became a natural forum for the Budapest group of musicians in *Új Zenei Stúdió* (New Music Studio), whose minimal and repetitive style were akin to John Cage's, or for Hungarian artists who followed the trends of fluxus, conceptualism or minimalism. Last but not least, *Magyar Műhely* at the time was for us a pool of information. We lived in

a closed society into which news of various Western European or overseas literary and artistic events and the works themselves made their way with great difficulty. All artistic activities which were stamped "illegal" made a political case in such a repressed society. That is why a great number of contemporary artists embraced the Western avant-garde trends of the 60s and 70s. Hence the importance of *Magyar Műhely* of Paris and *Új Symposion* of Újvidék (Novi Sad)—in those years Yugoslavia was a relatively more open and more democratic country than Hungary.

The closed nature of the political system caused more than one individual tragedy. In the early 70s quite a few artists, musicians and writers, who were unable to adjust themselves to the manipulated cultural policies in Hungary and therefore deemed their own situation hopeless, left the country for the West. Devoid of prospects as artists, some committed suicide. Out of the literary and artistic group which formed a theatre company under the name Kassák Theatre, which worked first in Hungary and then abroad, and whose "illegality" led to exile, only Miklós Erdély, painter, writer, film-maker, critic and theoretician, remained in the country and with stubborn determination managed to make a name for himself as a seminal alternative, avant-garde artist with a school of his own. Erdély (1928–1986) started his literary and artistic life in the 50s at a time of political confrontation. He sought the alternative potential everywhere. Even though he only made short experimental films with novel, unusual visual and acoustic effects, he became known as a film-maker. His films never reached a wider audience, yet together with his theoretical works made a great impact on the young generation; important film-makers, among them Gábor Bódy, regarded Erdély as their master. The same was true of his artistic activity: his paintings and drawings could hardly be placed in Hungarian traditions and were actually much closer to Western gesture painting, thus exerting a great influence on younger artists. In his poetry Erdély distanced himself from the dominant poetic usage and clichés of the day and created philosophical and experimentalist works which were not allowed to be published in the Hungary of the 50s and 60s. His first volume was published by *Magyar Műhely* in Paris in 1974. The same year he was awarded the Kassák Prize (not an official award, but offered by a private foundation) together with Dezső Tandori, another influential poet, who in his poetry followed similar objectives as Erdély did, though he was able to integrate them into the structure of more traditional poetry too. Erdély remained the leading personality of Hungarian avant-garde literature up to his death in 1986. His collected poems, entitled *Idő-Mőbiusz* (A Time-Moebius), were published posthumously, in 1991. His myth survives to this day. Erdély's oeuvre and literary-artistic activities are closely connected to the history of political resistance; how alternative, not directly political avant-garde literature became part of the political resistance against the totalitarian regime in the 70s can be clearly observed in them. Of the major poets of the period, Ottó Orbán,

Dezső Tandori and György Petri also had contacts with the underground and avant-garde grouping in which Erdély had his roots, even though Orbán and Petri are not avant-garde poets, and Tandori is not entirely so either. Orbán and Tandori have made something of a name for themselves outside Hungary as well. Tandori's work, in which minimalism, concretism and conceptualism manifest themselves, has had a huge impact on the younger generations, conveying to them both earlier trends and the latest experimental efforts.

While the trends described as avant-garde made great advances in the early 80s, the demand for pure classical forms has paradoxically grown as well, and artistic traditions invoked by the names of Mallarmé and Rilke strengthened. The reasons are simple. In the early 80s, alongside the avant-garde trends, any other endeavours that were basically alien to the official collectivist-populist views received attention. This was especially true for the classical middle-class traditions from the beginning of the century, upheld by those who published in the review *Nyugat* and later in *Újhold* (New Moon) which appeared for some years after the end of the Second World War. That is why in the poetry of Dezső Tandori, arguably the most versatile and perhaps the most significant poet at the end of the millennium, radical innovation and experiment are found alongside classic forms such as the sonnet.

Such were the alternatives the young poets were faced with when they started at the beginning of the 80s. Suddenly, almost overnight, Hungarian poetry displayed many colours which for long had been lacking or dormant—free verse and visual art, beat poetry and language games, expressionism and classical forms were all present in it together. Just as we started experimenting with the language-centred avant-garde, neo-conservative, neo classic works budded and the two trends had points of contact too. We understood that the sonnet and "concrete" poetry sought the same purity, and in the work of several poets the "double" vision is merely an appearance, with the avant-garde and the postmodern forming a specific unity.

With the gradual "softening"—in actual fact, decline—of the Kádár dictatorship in the early 80s, the self-organization of literature suddenly started, thanks to movements that had started from below. At its beginning, the avant-garde trends played a leading role in this process. While the "young" generation (those aged between 20 and 35 who still had no volumes of their own published thanks to the slow and awkward pace of publishing in the single-party state) demanded a place for themselves in a reorganized cultural life and sought new solutions within the József Attila Circle. Smaller literary groupings also emerged, articulating their own credos and refusing the standardized, egalitarian, "People's Front" attitudes of a centrally controlled cultural life. Young visual poets got together and exhibited their works; others launched "live" reviews which, for want of publication permits, were read out at literary evenings and performances. Furthermore, there were samizdat papers too in the early 80s, for example the

art review *Aktuális levél* (Topical Letter) published by the painter György Galántai, or the series of booklets, *Médium-Art,* which I edited.

The fermentation that started in the early 80s also left its mark on older writers. The Paris review *Magyar Műhely* underwent a significant change. The first meeting of its authors and editors with writers in Hungary which was finally organized in 1985, became a major introductory event for avant-garde literature and also a spectacular opening towards Hungarian literary centres in the West. Even more important was *Újhold* re-launched in 1986 as a yearbook, published twice a year by Balázs Lengyel and Ágnes Nemes Nagy, who had originally edited it. It carried on the best traditions of "urbanite" poetry, that is the classical heritage. The "plebeian" trend also prepared for reorganization and radical changes, their review, *Hitel* (Credit)—however, only appeared after the political changes.

In the mid-80s, with the decline of the dictatorship and the loss in the importance of the political message, avant-garde trends came to a turning-point. The expressive avant-garde had become a spent force, neo-Classicism strengthened, and postmodernism appeared on the scene. The apparent unity of alternative efforts continued to disintegrate, with apolitical, artistic trends gaining predominance or, after "the experimental period", the advent of the classical forms, a "new sensibility" evolved which was soon to question the *raison d'être* of all experiments. In this period Tandori created visual verses alongside poems evoking an Art Nouveau mood. Of the younger poets, Flóra Imre surprised her readers with sonnets, László Villányi laid closed forms on his prose poems. László Garaczi and Lajos Parti Nagy, who came from the outer circles of the avant-garde, built their work on puns, irony, and language games.

The Hungarian poetry of the past fifteen years is the a product of the pre-change-of-the-regime period when, initially, Sándor Weöres, István Vas and Ágnes Nemes Nagy were still active and were to eventually receive acclaim from the regime. However, all the new artistic movements were geared to dismantle the dictatorial system and support the emergence of pluralism in culture and the arts. On the other hand, the second half of the period was characterized by pluralism and uncertainty, a search for values, and the loss of values, all resulting from the political changes that eventually took place in 1989. As far as literature and the arts were concerned, the 80s were indeed a golden age, in which we looked in awe at the greatness of pluralism, soon to change into a cavalcade and, in a certain sense, chaos in which truly progressive trends and outstanding artists are hard to find. Although those mostly young poets, acknowledged representatives of contemporary poetry, whose works are presented in the following pages, may represent widely differing trends, they are undoubtedly similar in one respect; they grew up under a monolithic, dictatorial regime and have made their adjustments to another world which may be described as a normal, democratic existence in which the place and the role of poetry are different to what they were in earlier times. ❧

Poets of the Younger Generation

Selected by András Petőcz

Tanslations by Gerard Gorman (Tibor Zalán's poems)
and Jascha Kessler

Tibor Zalán

Madam Today the Sky Is Starshooting...

Asszonyom ma hullócsillagos az ég...

madam today the sky is starshooting today once more
too much clotted blood in my mouth while you
dance to happy music I sink into thirsty sand
and dream of our endless lovemaking.
things could be bleaker that's for sure
by the time this poem's finished the day will have broken
you'll be already in a swooning sleep under tousled hearted
cypresses death drills its tool between your parted thighs
the sky is starshooting madam today the woodland strays
from beneath our window the sad warmth from beneath our heads
my identity card expired my last extension expired too.
for police for love I'm the villain free to be whipped. like
murderers—dilettanti cast their dice on my cloak
on faraway shores dead listless girls strip and cover
my face with their shirts. just fine to be someone's memory
the tram soars above trees sleepily you fly there
and burst into tears when you casually glance down

I Address Myself

Szólítom magam: anyádnak írj verset

I address myself: write a poem to your mother
which doesn't resemble you and doesn't resemble
any other poem ever written to mothers
at most it resembles water the morning light
the painful frown on your face which sinks into sunshine
hard woman you should disown me
slam your doors before me
when you behold my shadow lurching round the corner
and dazed street-lilacs admiring my fluttering hair
I'll pass away sooner than expected
I'll pass away in finer way than you think
only I'm afraid you won't realize it:
perhaps I'm too good
but just like a clown in the sawdust's gold
bliss and life stumble over me
kindness abandons me too like a hungry rat a house
with boarded up windows
later mother I'll write a poem to you
like the ones other people usually write to mothers
you'll put it away a treasure until it yellows
until the last happy afternoon turns yellow too
and what are planted in the sky turn yellow the
great white great white great white dahlias

Miklós Erdély

A Time-Moebius

Idő-Mőbiusz

1. *What is to be and can re-act, is.*
2. *What reacts on itself, knows itself as its cause.*
3. *He who returns to act as his own cause, makes himself.*
4. *He who acts as cause of his own cause makes himself as he already is.*
5. *He nevertheless could not have made himself as he already is had he not already made himself as he is, although he'd made himself as he is by himself as he had already become.*
6. *What is afterwards reaches back to before to become afterwards.*

7. *So it makes itself as it is by what it is.*
8. *Therefore to be free to be free is to be free in time.*
9. *If you live believing you can reach back to every instant of your life, you live saved by yourself.*
10. *One is thus subjected to one who knows one best: oneself.*
11. *Fear thyself.*
12. *What is to be, already is.*

Law/Chance: A Moebius

Törvény-véletlen-Mőbiusz

1. *Whatever is, is lawfully so.*
2. *Law is law by chance.*
3. *What's fortuitous comes naturally.*
4. *What's lawfully so is not naturally so.*
5. *It changes.*
6. *Hence law alone is naturally so.*
7. *Law makes the same things the same when things are the same.*
8. *What happens again does not happen.*
9. *Whatever happens happens because law makes it happen again, consequently cancelling it.*
10. *Law naturally being law, happens again, consequently cancelling itself.*
11. *Hence what is, is what it is by chance.*
12. *Hence it is so naturally.*
13. *If law is lawfully law,*
14. *then law is not naturally so:*
15. *it changes.*

Balázs Györe

Film Archive: A Movie in a Movie

Filmtár: film a filmben

*I live in storage. In a shack. A film archive. To give it more class: a film factory. By day, my office. Evenings and nights, my living-, work-, bath-, and bedroom. (*re *this setup, cf. Melville's* Bartleby the Scrivener.*)*
Furnished: desk, 2 chairs, 1 shelf, regulation cot, and a film worktable, at which table sits my "technical assistant," Aunt Margie, splicing endless filmstrips.

Aunt Margie's okay. Nice lady. Useful co-worker. Makes a good brew. Hums to herself now and then.

Desk: raw wood. Right-hand drawers: essays by Béla Hamvas, a bibliography. Diaries; Literature and Education. *Left-hand, a film catalogue; typing paper, envelopes, pen, rubber stamp, order forms.*

3,500 reels preserved in cans or paper boxes in this storage. Subjects like animal husbandry, culture and tradition, occupational-healthcare, safety—environment-hazards, geography, juvenile literature, agriculture, arts, teaching techniques, sports, history and politics, scientific-industrial-technological.

Pigeons, my boss raises. Once he went on bitching endlessly about a terrific, white 1 lb. bird. He had to go all the way to Esztergom to find the right grain (no feeding his flock on commercial birdseed) because he couldn't get it in Komárom or Tata, not even Tatabánya.

As head of the archive, I'm the man who drops by personally to discuss lending problems and how to get more use out of our film-holdings.

No loans Saturday.

András Petőcz

In Praise of the Sea

A tenger dícsérete

At the edge you stop,
like that, easily,
though in your head
you let the pen run on,

tracing its airy arcs,
its peaceful, lighthearted
jogging run over
the undulating endless

smooth white blank
page of paper,
you let it run as though
running over the sea,

your feet touching
the tops of the waves,
treading their troughs,
arcing over their crests,

the pen, your pen it is,
half-dreaming, half-falling,
and yet still:
almost awake.

At the edge you stop,
infinite waters before you
infinite watery surface,
and you glance at it,

contemplating the waves,
their life rising, falling,
resurging, panting, dashing up,
and crashing down again,

and up above! the gulls
screeching in the air,
albatrosses, and
all those other birds

flying and floating by
as you gaze at them,
envying their easy flow
over their own pages;

and watch your pen
run on, on yours,
your laughter as they
run, racing up

from out of nothing,
your words, the waters,
their deepest deeps,
the repeating rhythms

perhaps, of the waves
falling again, and new again,
the crashing tops of the waves,
and the longing,

the longing to utter
at last, to be able at last
to utter, to tear out of yourself
out of yourself

rend from yourself that
What is *this? Infinite waters...*
and a still sea.
The light voice!

The sea cannot be uttered,
whether heavily, or
lightly, the prankish
pen runs nowhere.

But the birds! They know
why they are wheeling
overhead, and they know
who called them here,

and who it is
will gently see
to them when their
loveliness is gone.

Ákos Szilágyi

You Think

Azt hiszed

Think I'll forget, think I'll forgive you,
my bred-in-the bone murderer?
Think I just slid from under your heel
as it came down monstrous on me,
think I'll let you stroll with your sweetie now
down the tender aisle of grape leaves?
As I lie spinning on my lacquered back
an inch away from your town's gigantic shoes?
You actually think I'll just fade away
like a drizzle if you look at the sky?
Still don't know me, my little June-bug?

O

Ó

o happy days
rolling out of those little clockwork gears
fading away from the face of the clock,
happy days, rambunctious watermelons,
the burlap sack slung over time's shoulder
is bulging—let's go!
happy days, the sun's shining
right through my five fingers,
o you voracious dumb-bell happy days,
pressing my ear against your swagging belly
nights I listen to your happy, burbling guts

László Villányi

Hail, Movie

Üdv néked, mozi

The stop sign did its job. She scanned the movie schedules until I caught up with her. Naturally, the last thing she'd said made me keep on going: "We'd better not speak for a while." I couldn't tell whether five whole years have opened the door.

Good thing was that movie wasn't showing. The few people there seemed to be there just so I could sit in my usual seat and feel our hands meeting under my arm the way they met then. She shed her coat a few rows in front of me and lifted her hair from the back of her neck, though not—unbelievably—for my lips to get at it.

Before the film came on I saw all the movies we'd seen together and all the theatres. And then the projector started rattling. I knew what she was thinking through every scene. How she'd manage the dialogue, answer questions. What the writer, what Christmas, what the priest's sermon all reminded her of. Did Lumière ever dream of a show like that?

The Four Seasons

Négy évszak

Up and down the bank he walks, the old man. Flexes one arm oddly, holding it away from his side. (It's here that someone took it from him forty years ago.)

Walks down the river. Looks out, surprised, as though something were coming on the the current. (She would come wearing gray in springtime, red in summer, violet in fall.)

In wintertime takes his cap off, raises it before him tilting his head to one side, sets it just so there. It drops from his fingers to the snow. (He'd lend her his cap in the cold because her head was always bare.)

Wades into the water in all four seasons. Sits. Grins. Spreads one arm, then both. Turns about. Kneels. Stretches his legs out. (They would bathe together. She would soap him.)

Back on shore, he makes odd movements with both arms, bends over, takes two steps forward. (She would slip into his robe that way in his room. The zipper was jammed.)

Flóra Imre

Psalm

Zsoltár

I'm comforted by none at all
if you my lord won't comfort me
and nothing needs my hands or me
if you have not asked for me at all

yours it is to judge, my lord
to stop these quarrels and trials,
to stop this life and its trials
if life makes no sense, my lord

my lord, permit me to leave this place
permit me to make my way back
with hopes torn to rags on my back,
where pity, not justice, holds place

where neither humility rules nor pride
but mercy alone and peace, my lord,
open that eternal house, now, my lord
bring me to its threshold, let me step inside

Snow Covers the Garden

A kertre hó hull

snow covers the garden, the night is gray
we see mere nothings as in a mirror
calm have I always sought, and not terror
it's not the Blessed Virgin's Lenten way

silence waste and peace to be found nowhere
the snow sifts down the trees stand bare and still
the signs we leave are signs of signs that will
say we are or were all the signs once there

the city looms a yellowed dome of light
shreds of a tattered sky go slipping past
what gleams above the snowy garden's night

wings of silence ever heavier wings
heavy portents that we too fall at last
thought I sought in calm just what dying brings

Sándor Kányádi

Metaphors Coming Apart at the Seams

A Tale of Tales

Exactly thirty years ago, in Vienna, during a talk given at the invitation of the Austrian PEN Club on Transylvanian or, more precisely, on Hungarian poetry from Romania, I coined a phrase to define what is most characteristic of our poetry: potential symbolism. By this I then meant and still mean that latent or perhaps dormant symbolism which lies in readiness as it were, and appears only when certain attitudes or feelings towards life advance like a weather front, giving to poems until then considered or felt to be descriptive-picturesque or amorous, sometimes even to poems written to delight the very young or to enrich their vocabulary, an entirely different social content, meaning and role. Since then I have myself witnessed the existence of this—for want of a better word, dormant—symbolism.

I have seen it rise and surge, and in the last six or seven years, seen it sink to its bed.

Poetry in our country today is what it should be, what it ought to be, just poetry. Perhaps.

The reader does not look for, cannot perceive, cannot find social or political content in poems any more. At least not at this time. It has become unnecessary, not as in the lean years, when there was no freedom in public life, no freedom of the press to speak of; when it fell to writing, especially the writing of poetry, to carry every burden, national and social; when, especially for national minorities here in Eastern Central Europe, poetry—to coin a biological metaphor—was the only possible metabolism in our intellectual life. We had to metaphorize everything, or the reader did it for us, forever reading between the lines, searching for the hidden meaning. And as the Holy Writ says, *Seek and ye shall find.*

Looking back, many laughable examples and laughable cases come to mind. The empathy of readers, this capacity to project themselves onto what they were reading, not only increased the strength and power of the written word, but made legends of certain writers, whose every mani-

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festation was followed with close attention, whose every word was devoutly passed on. If a certain Someone, generally mentioned by first name only, happened to say in the dead of winter that spring would be here soon, word would get about that winter was coming to an end, it would soon be spring—and it was not just any person who had said so. And this would be emphasized by a wink.

For thirty years I worked for a children's paper, and—as I put it—seasons came and went more often in my writing than in real life. What else was there to write about, if one wanted to do honest work? Consequently, I had my proper share of the aforementioned glory. For example:

Sometime in the beginning of the seventies, I was giving a talk in a village school in the backwoods of Transylvania. During a programme improvised on the spur of the moment in my honour, the children chosen to recite poetry were so awed by the occasion that they kept drying up. So, to restore their self-confidence, we recited a well-known Petőfi poem together, one that I was sure everybody knew by heart, the adults too, anyone who had at least two or three years of schooling. Then, to prove how clever they were, I made a bet with them, wagering that they would be able to learn a poem they had never heard or read before if we said it aloud, all of us together, three times. To their great delight, after the second choral recitation they did not need my help to chant:

Wood, field and meadow
all covered deep in snow.
Everything's white all around,
just like grandmother's bun.

Everything's white all around,
just like grandfather's whiskers.
All around, everything's white
except for the blackbird's feathers.

I won my wager. We had got to the liver paste sandwiches—the staple diet at the time, as liver paste was the cheapest tinned food available, and my hosts were most often teachers and librarians whose modest salaries did not run to much else; some days I visited three or four villages, generally schools, community and cultural centres—as I say, we had got to the liver paste sandwiches, when the young teacher of Hungarian literature said in a soft, conspiratorial tone:

"The blackbird stayed black, and shall stay that way!"

I did not understand at once what he meant by this and started to explain that yes, the poem was like a child's drawing—later on this became the title—a white page with a blackbird drawn in black. "We understood what you meant: come hell or highwater, the blackbird will stay black!" he said, and gave an encouraging wink to indicate there was nothing new that I could teach him. What

could I have said to a poor teacher of Hungarian—I didn't want to upset his beliefs. But the following day, when the chief librarian of the children's library in a large city, an old university colleague of mine at that, winked at my blackbird, saying what he liked most about my poems was that one could always find oneself in them, no matter if one was present in the form of a blackbird, the main thing was that one was there—I just had to laugh. It was no good my trying to make a joke of my blackbird, to laugh the matter off. He laughed at me and told me say what you like, we know the poem is about us. In the end I too began to believe there was something of a blackbird in all of us, but didn't take it seriously enough to be able to refrain from relating the incident as a funny story some months later in a company of Hungarians from Yugoslavia. We would have got a good laugh out of it if a learned gentleman, a former minister for national minorities under President Tito, did not curb our laughter, saying, in deadly seriousness: they were quite justified in perceiving the blackbird as a symbol, you yourself, if subconsciously, must have meant it as such. After that, all further explanation would have been quite useless. I had to resign myself once and for all to the fact that grass, tree, flower, animal, bush, winter, spring, summer, autumn, in other words every season, every living thing, plant, animal, bird becomes a symbol in a poem. Such was the situation—the poetical situation at the time. As absurdly funny as it was sad.

It often happened that, preceding the reader, the vigilant pre-reader—the censor—smelled a rat. Smelled some kind of irregularity, something incongruous between the advanced age of Tudor Arghezi, the great Romanian poet of the century, and the message of his superb poem "I Thirst", written late in life. The poem begins this way:

Lingering on, day after day
I would eat, I would drink
but I cannot tell
just anyone
what kind of food, what manna
would sustain me....

Then he lists all that he has and adds that he's had enough of it all, of the good and the bad, though they stand in stacks... And in the last line, he says: It is you I hunger for, you for whom I thirst.

What does he mean he's had enough of everything, what has he had enough of? And if he has everything, why does this old man, over eighty, still covet things, what is it that he thirsts for? Surely he doesn't want to have us believe he's in love? That would be ridiculous, at his age. So must the wary pre- or rather fore-readers have reasoned. And they could not allow the great poet of the nation to lay himself open to ridicule by professing himself in his dotage

to be in love. No one in their right senses would believe it, but would try to read between the lines, try to find something, a symbol, it doesn't bear thinking about, the kind of ideas and association of ideas that would emerge out of those old man's verses. Such must have been the thoughts coursing through the minds of the vigilant-eyed, there on the other side. Small wonder in an age when the saying of a disciplined little functionary could go the rounds to become a maxim: "Thinking is a dangerous occupation, for those who think may turn their thoughts against us." To sum up, the leading cultural and literary paper of the country was not permitted to publish the poem. I don't know what reasons they gave to the maître by way of explanation, for when I asked him, he just smiled and gave a wave of the hand and thanked me for having had the courage to translate it into Hungarian and publish it. It was not courage that I needed to do this, but patience and time, I spent three weeks fretting over it before I succeeded in turning that masterpiece of only twenty-two lines into Hungarian. It never entered the Hungarian censor's mind that I may have translated it from the manuscript, and he wouldn't have dared question Arghezi. He may have taken it for what it is, a love poem. Love has struck others in old age, even Goethe, he must have thought—for there were some among the censors who had read the classics, and even some who were highly educated. That was how it came about that a poem by the greatest Romanian poet was first published in a Hungarian minority weekly.

Nowadays no such mysteries happen with and around poetry. It is understandable that interest in poetry has waned. Where are those volumes of poetry published in several tens of thousands of copies? The numbers have dwindled, diminished to a couple of hundred, at the most a couple of thousand. And I must say, though with a heavy heart, thank goodness.

Metaphors are coming apart at the seams
like some old and threadbare eiderdown,
only moths devour the down, and worse,
it's too much of a bore even for the winds to disperse.

There is no need any longer to wrap into poems, into metaphors all that may now be made known in newspapers, on television and radio, or even shouted in the street. Yet there is some real uneasiness mingled with nostalgia in that thank goodness of mine. Seeing the deluge of alkalizing rather than fertilizing poems flowing unimpeded, unrestrained, one involuntarily thinks of the words Thomas Mann put into the mouth of the old Goethe, who started the day by reading the papers: Why do I hate this precious freedom of the press? Because it breeds mediocrity. End of quotation. Well, one must admit there is some truth in this.

unclothed, stripped to the skin
it offers itself, though winter is coming
the poem bares itself, shameless, like many
who prostitute themselves for money

Another common feature of the writing of young poets today—who otherwise show clear indication of real talent—is that their poems are dressed up in an ostensive way, returning in top hat and tails and swinging a cane, as if on some kind of nostalgic journey, to the period between the two world wars. There are newspapers instead of an undershirt beneath all the frills and ruffles, and one cannot always tell whether the lack of underpants is intentional or due to lack of funds, which may be the reason why they say things that would formerly have been unprintable. Obviously the intention behind all this is some kind of revolt—or at least an attempt to *épater les bourgeois*—against the excessive dressing up of the recent past. Yet we are forever lamenting that we do not have a bourgeoisie in the western sense of the world— which is true. T.S. Eliot is quite right in saying that poetry is beholden to language. For there is no poetry without language. It is to the interest of poetry, and its duty, to support, enrich and add hue to language— and to save it if it is in danger of extinction or eradication. It was this last that we were afraid of not so very long ago, so it is understandable that there were—there still are—writers who try to dress up their work linguistically in the way a bride is dressed in tradition-bound regions, so that you can barely see the bride for the finery. I remember one time watching a performance by a provincial company playing a Transylvanian piece in the National Theatre of Budapest in the company of an American lady of Hungarian extraction who spoke very good Hungarian. I hoped she would like the play, which had met with great success in our country, and as she was a professional, a certificated translator to boot, that she would perhaps be disposed to translate it. Much to my resentment she fell asleep during the performance. By way of excuse she pleaded that the embroidery on the wall, or on the tablecloth, whatever, was very pretty, but that the author was not a pro. Without a doubt the young people of today already spoken of cock a snook (or, on occasion they bare their bottoms) at this excessive finery, at the embroidery. Language cannot be the object of literature, of poetry, not even its tool. They belong to each other. They are companions for life, consequently are contemporaries. Living language is always modern. True poets are true and contemporary poets linguistically if they succeed in distilling the living language of their age in such a way that it retains all the values, all the flavour and zest of the past, and over and above affording delight with its suggestiveness and richness, if this serves as a suitable foundation for posterity.

Instead of philosophizing, I'll use a parable to demonstrate how it came to pass that the translator fell asleep during that performance.

Soon after the telephone was invented, plans were made to connect the old continent with the new, Europe with America, using a cable with the aid

of which one thousand conversations could be conducted simultaneously. The cable was laid, fashioned according to the taste of the age, ornamented in the Art Nouveau style—despite the fact that most of it lay at the bottom of the ocean, where not even the fish could have found pleasure in it. The cable broke several times while it was being laid but it was always raised and repaired. As far as I know it is in working order to this day. It was a great and modern achievement. But today, with our present-day knowledge of science and technology, when the main point, the trick is to transmit as many signals as possible with the least possible recalcitrance of matter—though one has to be careful with these signals, as we'll see later—to transmit as many signals as possible as far as you possibly can—like Beckett, for example, or in terms of Hungarian poetry, and in a more moderate way, like Nemes Nagy, Pilinszky, Weöres did—if that is the trick, as I have said, then if someone tries to transmit the electric current generated on the side by a country mill to the next village by means of an ornamented cable that can in no way be called economical, then he is not only behind the times, but also ridiculous or at least soporific.

"A good writer's aim is to express himself with precision, a dilletante's is to write beautifully," Gyula Illyés often wrote and said.

I have other examples that show the interdependence of poetry and language. Also in terms of modernity. The habitat of modernity varies from country to country, language to language, sometimes it varies even in nature.

An outstanding Swedish poet, a very sick man as I have recently been told, was some ten or so years ago grappling with the re-translation of the Song of Songs. Have the existing translations become so obsolete? They have grown a little old, he said, and by retranslating the work, appealing to what remains of Swedish religious sentiment, I'd like to do something for this language, so close to extinction, he explained. Is it English that's endangering it? English too, in part, but above all the *Zeichensprache,* he emphasized in German as well. The language of signs. The endeavour to simply designate notions, to initialize. And he said something else in Swedish, which my colleague and friend, the late Géza Thinsz, who lived there, translated as linguistic castration, language emasculation, lightening the Swedish colleague's anxiety to the extent of a laugh.

Speaking of Stockholm, where the covetous glances of men of letters turn every autumn from every hidden corner of the world, let me relate, though it is not really to the point, let me pass on what I heard from our friend Thomas on our way to lunch. "That's the Exchange Palace," he said, gently poking me in the ribs and pointing to the truly imposing building, "that's where the twelve old men come together every month to snooze while a younger old man reads aloud to them from the examples of world literature scheduled to be judged. He reads and reads, monotonously, impassively, without showing any interest. Then he suddenly raises his voice, the wise men start up, and say, that's it! And that

autumn, that's the one who'll get it. Of course this is only hearsay, a rumour circulated by those who don't stand a chance of ever having anything of theirs read aloud, or even read." The lunch took place in an extremely elegant establishment. Appraising the menu, I decided to sample a piece of Hungarian mythology, the Miraculous Stag. So I ordered reindeer in wine sauce. What can I say? It was authentic, several thousand years old. From now on I shall follow its tracks, but will not stab it with a knife, nor spear it with my fork.

There is no need to turn back from the Swedes for a telling example of the interdependence of poetry and language, and, let us add, the community that speaks the language, all we have to do is to sail over to Tallinn. The winter before last in Estonia, during the presentation of my book, where I was given a very cordial and warm welcome, the kind befitting a kinsman, I happened to say, and not without design, for some years earlier in Oslo I had used the same shot and it had found its target, a fact that I confessed to the Tallinnians, I said I was very proud that my poems had been published in Estonian, much prouder than if they had been published in English. They were taken by surprise by my blatant flattery, but had a good laugh when they heard my explanation —which was rather like a demonstration of a lesson in physics—of the reasons for my pride. I picked up an empty glass—luckily the necessary equipment was all at hand on the table, water and fruit juice—picked up an empty glass, as I said, in the manner that priests are wont to do during mass (I say this not with any intention of being sacrilegeous, just for the sake of the game) took the glass, then, and half filled it with water. I poured a couple of drops of fruit juice into the water. Has this changed the taste of the water?, I asked, holding the glass up high. No, not very likely, they answered in chorus. So I added another two inches of fruit juice to the water. And now? Now it has, they admitted, speaking with one voice. Well, you see, brethren, I said, as I had said to the Norwegians, if my poems had been published in English, it would have been like those first few drops of juice in the water, unnoticeable. Large nations are self-sufficient. They have no need of other nations, not even other large nations, to say nothing of us smaller ones. To the best of my knowledge, Shakespeare is not worshipped in France, and vice versa, the British do not make much of the great masters, the classics of other nations, as we Hungarians do. We know them, value them, make use of them, they are part of our lives. Daughters and sons of small nations must be very lucky indeed to obtain admission into the literary field of vision of large nations. We, small and smaller nations, not being self-sufficient, are generally more industrious, more diligent than the larger nations. We try to compensate for, to counterbalance our numerical inferiority by aiming high, by an in-exhaustible thirst for knowledge, by a striving for a greater erudition, for higher cultural standards if you like. Luckily we are assisted in these efforts by our poets; most of our great poets are at the same time translators, thus the Hungarian reader has always been fortunate in having a knowledge of the very best of world literature and

poetry through and on a level with the best Hungarian poets. And as far as I know, the same is true for the other, smaller or somewhat larger European nations. That is the reason why I dared profess to be prouder to be published in Estonian, and could only have been prouder still if... But that's another story.

On the occasion of the Second World Convention of Finno-Ugric writers I was asked to give voice to the sorrows and tribulations of the third largest Finno-Ugric nation. This gradation is my own invention, for the first is of course the noble Hungarian nation, the second the honourable Finnish nation and the third, with no *epitheton ornans* to grace it, is the Transylvanian nation, or more precisely, the Hungarians of Romania, for there are almost twice as many of us as there are Estonians. What can I say, what can I complain of to the little Eastern Finno-Ugrians, who, just in this century, along with the other peoples of the former Soviet Empire, have experienced such things that are unneccesary to describe to anyone? There were some among the delegates who came from the former Gulag region and it had taken them two weeks to reach the Hungarian town of Eger. They came from regions—as I later had occasion to experience—where mosquitoes form into cathedral-size clouds to launch their attack at dusk, in the evening, at night, regions around rivers running towards the Volga. It was there that I learned that one of the simplest methods of execution was to strip a prisoner to the skin and tie him to a tree in the evening, and by the time the sun rose the mosquitoes had done for him. I told this story, which had sent chills down my spine, to a Romanian colleague, but he just waved his hand sadly, and sighed: didn't you know that here in the Danube delta they did almost the same thing but in a much more refined way? They hung the chosen one into the water up to his waist among the leeches, and left only the part above the waist for the mosquitoes to deal with.

I could have given our Eastern kinsmen as another cause of complaint the fact that, according to my eldest son's calculations, in the last ten to fifteen years, about sixty of his former kindergarten-school-university fellows and friends have scattered and are now living all over the world, at best in Hungary, but many in the West, from Scandinavia to America, and some have even gone as far as Australia and New Zealand. In the eyes of an Ostyak, a Vogul, a Cheremiss or a Votyak, the fact that the circle of acquaintance of a single Transylvanian Hungarian could have yielded so many intellectuals is enviable—to say nothing of so many passports issued, or at the worst, so many possibilities to escape. My complaints would have seemed like boasting to them. Being familiar with the fate of those even further East, perhaps I should relate the words of a Gypsy girl, which I will evoke with the following metaphor story.

When my sons were younger and we found ourselves in dire need of home help, or as they're nowadays called, an *au pair girl,* there was a shortage of domestic servants. After what seemed to be an endless period of inquiries and

writing letters, someone recommended a girl from a valley in the distant Eastern Carpathians, a girl whom I had to go and fetch myself, for she had never travelled further than the town nearest her village, and she'd not been there more than twice in her life. But she is an honest, decent girl, said the person who recommended her. Which was quite true. So I went to fetch her by train and car. And when I got there and she was led out like a native girl by her wailing, lamenting mother, there stood before me a beautiful, ebony-haired, ivory-toothed, buxom, stately Gypsy girl. Don't cry, mother, I'm not taking her off to the wars, I said to allay the fears of the old woman. Her tears stopped at once. And she gave me plenty of sound advice as to how we should treat this daughter of hers. Meanwhile, I was preparing a speech in my mind with which to dispel the scruples or racial prejudices of my wife, should they arise. President Nixon, he was President of the United States at the time, has coloured staff working for him too. And we, who are a minority, fighting against all sorts of discrimination... But the speech for the defence proved to be unneccesary. After her first surprise my wife realized that we had got ourselves a truly honest, clean, decent but, as we found out the very first evening, totally illiterate girl. My older son immediately took it upon himself to change this state, while I set to and did the washing up, after all the housework couldn't wait. For a couple of days everything went fine, but after a while our girl began spending more and more time looking out of the window in the direction she suspected her homeland to lie with tear-bedimmed eyes. And soon her fellow-countrymen, my journalist colleagues, were proved right: they had predicted that she wouldn't last out the week without her family. The week was not yet up when she confronted us, shamefaced, eyes brimming with tears, saying may the Lord God forgive her sins as she knows very well she'll never have it so good, and would we please forgive her too, but she can't be without her own. We understood, of course we did, I went to buy her ticket home, and my wife took her to buy a present to take home to her mother, after all, she'd been in service, if only for a short time; it wouldn't do to go home empty-handed.

And now for the metaphor!

At the time there were students from far-off places such as Africa studying in our town, and as my wife and our girl were walking along the street, a midnight black young man came along from the opposite direction. Our girl pressed close to my wife in alarm.

"Oh, what's that?" she asked fearfully.

"A Negro," answered my wife.

"What's that?"

"A man, a black man."

A joyful smile lit up the Gypsy girl's face.

"Who are we to complain, then!"

By way of solace, I told the following Indian tale to our Eastern relations to prove that there are people living under worse conditions than they, in constant, unremitting fear, compared to whom they could say the very same words that the Gypsy girl uttered upon seeing the young man whose skin was even darker than hers. It was not a tale about the West, the North American prairies, where about a hundred and thirty tribes number not much more than half a million souls altogether, less than the number of Votyaks living in the region of Izevsk or in other parts of Russia. My information was obtained from an Indian priest in the beginning of the seventies, from the bulletin issued towards the end of the eighties by the American embassy in Bucharest, as well as from the Finno-Ugric Faculty of the University of Izevsk, where one can specialize in Udmurt-Votyak-Hungarian and Udmurt-Finnish, and there is a Hungarian and a Finnish Department. This story originates from glorious Rio de Janeiro, where I heard it at an International PEN Congress.

The president of the Hungarian PEN happened to say, right after the first day, during our after-dinner walk along the sea-shore in front of the Copacabana Plaza Hotel where we were accomodated, in his disarmingly amiable, yet caustic way. It seems as if this congress were for palefaces only. I had thought much the same thing. The first change of skin tone from pale to brown is the lift boy's, then, as you reach the basement, the area around the swimming-pool, everyone is black, I said, rounding off my friend M.H.'s observation. I had heard also that there was an entry headed "colour of skin" in their identity cards. There was one Indian girl among us, though. A native. It was she who gave the last lecture before the closing banquet, which few people attended, as everyone was getting ready for the great public dinner awaiting us in the most elegant Yacht Club in the world. The girl told us that, only as far back as the twenties of this century, her tribe, in the Brazilian rain forest, numbered four hundred thousand souls, and at present numbers no more than seven thousand at the most. It was not disease but bullets that was responsible for this, and bullets constitute a threat to this day. They somehow forgot to invite the girl to the banquet. One of our colleagues from Stockholm invited her at his own expense, though of course he was not made to pay in the end. But the brown-skinned waiter wanted to serve the pale-faced gentleman first, turning his back on his native compatriot. Serve the lady first! thundered the Swedish colleague at the waiter. See, I told our Eastern relations, by way of solace, who are you to complain?

At the writers' congress previously mentioned, I was introduced to an attractive Estonian colleague, mother of four, who was holding a slim volume of poems in her hand, her own work. I asked her how many copies of the volume had been published, and to let me have a look at it. Five thousand, she said, modestly. That's good, I said, but was not really surprised. It has happened, when the times were hard, that volumes of poetry were published in fifteen or twenty thousand copies for the almost two million Transylvanian Hungarians,

but for a nation of one million souls, five thousand was a respectable number. In the West, a person has to be somebody, a very well-known English or German somebody, to have such a number of copies published. I wanted a copy of the Estonian colleague's book so that I could perhaps translate some of the poems with the help of friends who speak the language. But she had only the one copy, and she had already promised it to someone else. Besides, it wouldn't do you much good, she said, smiling, because it is in Southern Estonian. Southern Estonian? And is there such a difference between the two that a person who speaks Estonian wouldn't be able to understand it? He'd be able to understand it if he learned Southern Estonian. And how many Southern Estonians are there in the world? Twenty-five thousand.

That is the reason why I said what I said in Tallinn, that I am much prouder to have been published in Estonian than to have been published in English. And would only be prouder still if I had been published in Southern Estonian. Not that it would be a shameful thing if someone were to publish a Hungarian, or the son of another small nation, in English.

Thirty years have passed since I first used the phrase potential or dormant symbolism and last summer, as a guest at the Helsinki Festival, I was once again discoursing on Transylvanian, and Romanian poetry, on this occasion talking about my own poems. My surroundings were imposing, I was holding forth to an audience of about nine hundred in a huge marquée filled to capacity, and among other things I told them that one reason why I had been able to visit all the places where there are Hungarians in every corner of the world—and is there any place in the world where there are no Hungarians?—was that I did not accept invitations just because I was thereby able to visit many marvellous countries that would otherwise have been inaccesible to me, but also because my true object was the desire to be assessed, to be judged. These visits afforded me the opportunity to see whether the poems I had written under the Romanian socialist regime, which differed even from the neighbouring Hungarian socialist regime, whether these poems of mine, that have no close bonds with Hungarians in neighbouring or more distant countries other than the bond of a common language, and perhaps the bond of literary-historical fragments of memory that reach far back into time, would they be poems still, would they find favour with the Hungarians of the diaspora, dispersed all over the world?

I can say without boasting that they did find favour with them. A poet cannot desire greater recognition. I only wondered what some of them, especially those considered the most risky and which have since been translated into other, Western languages like Swedish, Norwegian, Dutch and perhaps English, and the effect of which I have had occasion to assess, what these poems could have meant, conveyed to the citizens of a nation living in comfortable security and peace, a poem like this one for example:

a jeep stood before the house
all night long
stood with its taillights burning red
as if it had just then
arrived as if
it was just about to leave
I had already aired the room was just
about to go to bed and leaned out
I usually look out
before closing the window and
then I saw the jeep
with the red taillights burning
what the hell slipped out
is anything the matter asked my wife
nothing I said just a jeep
what kind of jeep that kind
of jeep I said and arranged
the curtains perhaps you can see it
from here too I said
drawing towards the corner of the window...

It's a long poem, too long to continue. To sum up: the couple cannot fall asleep. They are afraid. They are afraid all night long. We had our reasons for being afraid. But what is the Swede, the Dutch, or the Englishman, famous for his cool, afraid of? Why does the poem have a *meaning* for them? And what does it tell them? If I were conceited I would have to say the century has struck root in my poem. In short, the point is that with the pulling down of the Iron Curtain, our fears have not dissolved, but fused. It makes no difference whether it is the jeeps of the Securitate, the State Security Authorities, the KGB or the Mafia that are standing before our houses. They can take us away, blow us up at any time, from anywhere. Regrettably, the great universal attitude towards life—as we agreed with the Finns—the feeling that commonly characterizes the end of the century, is FEAR. ❧

Erzsébet Scipiades

The Can-Can Forever!

When they appear on stage, they usually enter from two sides, but here they climb up on top of a garage so they can lift their skirts high. The rounded knees, the ruffled bloomers, the wide hips, the heavy breasts, the lips, painted a bright red, and lovely faces covered in a web of wrinkles are all there for the viewing.

"The can-can forever!" they said, these women in their sixties and seventies—this being several years ago, at Szentendre; they took each other's measurements, and began to cut and sew. When they pulled the blue, yellow, green and pink can-can dresses over their heads, rouged their cheeks, put on hats the size of palms with flowers, and ran out on stage after stage, audiences jumped to their feet in delight. They shouted and whistled and refused to believe that what they were seeing were Hungarian country women and not French beauties—ex-former factory hands, cooks and textile workers whose lives had never been easy.

Ilonka's husband, for instance, died a long time ago. Before that, he had a leg amputated. Ibolya's husband was found hanging from a walnut tree. Magdi's first husband drank like a sailor, and Rózsika married to get her own back. In succession, they all became widows; they were getting on in years, and all they were doing was sitting at home alone. Then they said to one another, why don't we all meet at the pump-house. And so they met, and their lives were never the same again. The twenty-seven square meters of the pump-house became heaven itself for the thirty-seven women and seventeen men who joined them there. Despite their wilting, the women felt like real women once again, and the men courted them. They recommended new members, and before long, being elderly and happy didn't seem so strange at all.

"This is how I met my angel, Ilonka," says Gábor Bazsó, as he kisses the plump arm of his wife. "Isn't she just like a mischievous angel?" he asks. "An angel, who makes me join in the fun? She's my second

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wife. The first died within five minutes, after a heart attack. I was sad, then I laid eyes on Ilonka. In order to be near her, I even went to the embroidery circle, though I'm a stone mason by trade. Ilonka's husband also died of arterial sclerosis. Then I moved here, to her house. We sold mine. We split the price four ways, three quarters of it went to my three children, and one we kept for ourselves. I've been here fourteen years. We're still in love. People said there's no true love, but we knew there was, even though we were seventy."

"Almost all of us are just living together," says Ilonka. "We didn't tie the knot. The Kisses aren't married, and Ibolya isn't married either."

"You see, mine was a good marriage," Ibolya explains, "but then it turned sour. My husband was a tailor, just like Rózsika's husband. We even lived on the same street. But my husband couldn't make enough working three shifts at the Újpest clothing factory. That's why he left to drive tractors. He passed his exams with top marks, but he had a serious accident driving a combined harvester. A head injury. The doctor said it'd get worse as time went by. But my husband, when I turned fifty, went to the walnut tree and hanged himself. It had a terrible effect on me. My menstruation stopped, I was all skin and bones. The psychiatrist said it's better like this than if my husband were alive, dying in his bed. That's why I don't want to get married, though I have a friend from the club. He's an educated man, an engineer with a diploma, but I didn't want to marry him. Now I spend more time at his place than at my own. My engineer friend says all the time, "I'm ready to marry you any time you are, Ibike."

"These days a piece of paper means nothing," Rózsika cuts in. "I'm not saying this because Laci and me, we're not married. We met in this club. We felt as if we'd known each other all our lives... I told my children, and they said if it's not going to last, they don't mind. But I moved in with Laci Kiss anyway. You know, I never did like my husband. I married him on the rebound, because I loved another man. He courted me for two years, he wanted me to sleep with him, but I'd made a promise to myself to stay a virgin until I was married. That's how it happened. Later I was sorry, I could not forgive him for sleeping with somebody else one night. My husband knew, he felt it all the time, that I just couldn't love him. And it made him suffer for twenty-eight years. But our origins kept us together. In 1947 his family and mine were both forced to resettle here from Upper Hungary. At the time, six thousand Hungarians lived in Vasznad, in Slovakia. They sent 5,400 off to fend for themselves. We came in rail wagons to Hungary, not to replace resettled Slovaks, but to take over the houses of the Swabians, to Császártöltés. They were expelled to Germany. We got deserted Swabian houses, and my future husband and his family got one where the dough for the bread was still in the kneading tub. Those Swabians had gone into hiding, and when the expulsion period was over, they turned up. They hated us, so whoever was able to, went and moved someplace else. But we got married there, in Császártöltés. There was a big wedding, and inside me the desire to get my own

back because of my other love. But I was scared, because of what happened to my sister. She let her friend do it and got pregnant. They took her to a midwife. The man ended up marrying her anyway, but by then the baby was gone. That's why I stuck to my virginity, and ended up unhappy as a result. But now...'"

"But now," the other women chime in, "she's in love!" And they raise their glasses of sweet cherry wine in her honour.

"Yes, yes," Ilonka says, "but there's a problem. My husband is lying in a crypt, and there's a place there reserved for me. And one for Gábor Bazsó, too, next to his wedded wife. I keep on saying to Gábor Bazsó, just imagine if I were your wife, too, who would lie next to whom?"

"Ilonka and her man and Rózsika and her man," Ibolya says with a smile, "are just like my grandparents were, together in good and bad. After they had five girls, and time was passing, my grandmother said, 'You know, what? We're getting on in years. Let's sleep in separate beds, and then you can snore as loud as you like.' And my grandfather said, 'If you dare do that to me, I'm leaving you!' And they slept together for fifty-seven years, until they died. Even the last year, even the last day. My grandmother would be sleeping, and my grandfather would stroke her arm and say, 'God, it was so beautiful, being with you.'"

"And it's beautiful for us, too," Gábor Bazsó cuts in. The women laugh full-heartedly. And they show photographs. "In this we were majorettes in front of Parliament, here we danced the charleston and the lambada... We've been asked to perform for the Social Democrats and the Workers' Party, too... In this picture, we're singing stuff from *Cats,* here we're bathing, here we're on an outing. For Carnival and the vintage festival, we get the city auditorium for free. There's always a full house. They want to see what it's like being old and happy. And they want to join us, but we say, 'Oh, we're so sorry, dears, but you must wait. Our pump-house is very small, and as you see, we're still around.'" ❧

Translated by Judy Sollosy

Olga Tóth

Working Women

Changing Roles, Changing Attitudes

The political and economic developments after the Second World War led to fundamental changes in the role of women in Hungary. Even at the end of the forties, Hungary was still a traditional agricultural society. It was a society in which women were blessed with very little in the way of mobility, where their place was determined by their circumstances: the family carrying on small-scale agricultural production, the urban petty bourgeois family, or the urban bourgeois family, a significant model if rather smaller in number.

The fledgling Soviet-style programme of social "modernization", with its coercive and extensive industrialization of the economy, demanded large numbers of new, largely unskilled, workers. The incorporation of women into production *en masse* was, indeed, supported by Soviet-style ideology, which identified social equality for women with their being wage-earners. For the majority of women, however, wage-earning was less a question of choice than of necessity. The incorporation of women into the workforce was so successful that by the eighties women and men were both in more or less full employment. The majority of women in full-time employment today have mothers who were or are similarly employed.

The burgeoning participation of women in the labour market had a knock-on effect on the family. The birth rate declined, and that, together with bad mortality figures, has meant that the population of Hungary has been decreasing since the early eighties.

Combining full-time employment with the role of housewife and mother has presented a serious problem for women. The socialist system's policy towards women and the family took full employment for granted, and was dictated by labour shortages. A network of subsidized child institutions was established (crèches, kindergartens, after-school day care), which, for the majority of working women, were affordable. At the same time they were often criticized for being crowded and thus capable of little more than acting as child holding-pens.

In the second half of the sixties the economy had a labour surplus, the most convenient solution to which was the removal of part of the female workforce. Child-care benefit (GyES) was introduced

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in 1967, which made it possible for mothers to stay at home until their children were three years old, a period in which they received a fixed payment, and after which they could return to their workplace. In 1985 this was accompanied by the child-care allowance (GyED), which was linked to the mother's income. With these measures the socialist state hoped to boost the birth rate and to encourage better qualified women with longer career backgrounds to have more children. GyES and GyED can be seen as model examples of social policy and policy toward women in Europe, although from the start sociologists were dubious about the expectation that these measures would lead to sustained growth in the birth rate; in addition it was clear that the withdrawal of women from the work place would strengthen their traditional family role and relegate them to the status of second-rate wage-earners.

Following the change of regime, the early nineties saw the continued widespread participation of women in the labour market. According to the 1990 census, 70 per cent of women of working age were actively employed, with a further 8 per cent inactively employed (receiving child-care benefit or child-care allowance). Some calculations suggest that in 1992 the economic activity of women (82.8 per cent) outstripped that of men (80.8 per cent, Frey 1993). In subsequent years the economic activity of both men and women has declined, which is primarily attributable to economic restructuring, or rather to the advent of mass unemployment in Hungary. At the same time, contrary to expectations, women have not been the primary victims of this unemployment: of the current 408,000 unemployed (9.3 per cent of the workforce) 60 per cent are men and 40 per cent are women. This ratio has been stable over the past few years. In practice, unemployment affects women in a greater proportion than this. Many opted for early retirement in order to avoid unemployment, not to mention that in the mid-nineties more than 10 per cent of women of working age were on GyES or GyED. Experience suggests that a significant proportion of these women find themselves unemployed after benefit runs out. The attitude of society towards women in the work place is so contradictory that articles, both in the press and in academic journals, or pronouncements by politicians frequently express or imply conflicting opinions. Particularly striking is the view that the process of getting women into jobs, begun in the late forties, was forced onto society and, as such, is clearly unacceptable. The argument is that the place of women is in the home, and that the decades in which they earned a wage are best considered an unhappy memory. This traditional role-model clearly goes back to that of the middle-class wife and mother before the Second World War. Others stress the need to guarantee women the right to choose. They see the ideal situation as one in which the husband is the primary bread-winner, except that in certain instances—should, for example, the family's life-cycle and obligations or the wife's ambition facilitate or necessitate it—she can take on (usually part-time) work. The emphasis here is on women accommodating to others' needs: Earning a wage is not seen to be of intrinsic value to a woman's life, rather as an exception, a kind of added extra. The model is the two-part work cycle for women, as widely current in Western European countries before the mid-eighties. A third view regards employment as a key aspect of human existence, and argues that with the help of paid work women can realize their potential and escape their subordination to men. This very ideology lay behind

the extensive economic development in the socialist years and the accompanying insatiable demand for labour, but is also closely related to the concept of feminism. Press debates in recent decades have for the most part tried to make the best of the two extreme positions, and as a kind of modern-day compromise have constructed the position which recommends women to take on part-time work, or work that adjusts to the family's life-cycle.[1]

Female wage-earning in particular phases of the family's life-cycle

In recent decades full employment was general in Hungary, 96–97 per cent of them working full-time, independently of what point their family's life-cycle was at. Our questionnaire inquired as to the extent to which members of the Hungarian population approved of this practice. Women with families experienced four distinct marital phases: the first, childless, the second with children under 6 at home; the third with school-age children; and the final phase of the marriage after all the children have left home. For each phase we asked whether women consider full-time, part-time or no employment as appropriate.

In general, it can be noticed that, in the minds of both men and women, attitudes toward the employment of women have undergone a dramatic change since 1988. Overall, the favouring of full-time employment has declined. Only in the first, childless, phase of the marriage do a high proportion of interviewees (73 per cent of men and 83 per cent of women) regard an eight-hour working day as acceptable. Even in the childless phase of the marriage, a higher proportion of men than of women favour part-time employment.

As far as the employment of mothers with pre-school children is concerned, the views of men and women are much closer to each other than they were in 1988. In the mid-nineties, a higher proportion of both sexes preferred mothers with small children not going to work. Especially striking is the change in the opinion of women, 60 per cent of whom wanted mothers with small children to stay at home in 1994 as opposed to 46 per cent in 1988. This proportion is higher than that for men in 1988. Attitudes to this phase of life are strongly affected by age and educational background in the case of women, but not in the case of men. The older the female interviewee, the more likely she is to think that mothers with small children should not go out to work. As for the

1 ■ The source for the following analysis is provided by a survey into "Family Values and Changing Gender Roles" conducted by the ISSP (International Social Survey Programme). Data was collected in Hungary in 1994 by TÁRKI. The same questionnaire was used in 23 other countries. This included post-Communist states such as the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Poland, Bulgaria, Russia and the new German provinces, i.e. what had been the GDR. Whenever it helps shed light on the analysis, I compare the Hungarian data with opinions in other post-Communist states. Some of the data are also worth comparing with the 1988 ISSP survey, when we used a questionnaire that was in part identical with the current one. For some questions we are in a position to trace their change over time, indeed over the period of transformation.

The sample size was 1500. Those questioned were geographically representative in that 19.5 per cent were from Budapest, 43.0 per cent were other towns, and 37.5 per cent were from the contryside. Women were slightly overrepresented in the sample at 57.8 per cent, as opposed to their proportion in the population of 53.1 per cent. As fas as age groups are concerned, under-35s are underrepresented, the middle-aged are correctly represented, and those over 56 are slightly overrepresented. Marital status split the interviewees as follows: 13.3 per cent single, 59.1 per cent married, 4.1 per cent living with partner, 8.1 per cent divorced, 16.4 per cent widowed/widowered.

women actually affected, half of the under-30 age group would like to see women doing at least part-time work, even during this phase. This view is particularly common amongst women who have completed a university degree.

Opinions concerning the employment of women with children of school age have changed in a similar way. Almost half of those questioned consider a four- to six-hour working day to be suitable for women in this phase, much as in 1988. The proportion of those in favour of an eight-hour working day however has decreased dramatically (by 11 per cent for men and 15 per cent for women), with a concomitant rise of those in favour of women staying at home. This means that—in contrast to 1988—there is no significant difference between the opinion of men and that of women on this question. But for both males and females there are differences reflecting age and educational background. Younger and better-educated interviewees usually think it right for mothers bringing up children of school age to take up at least part-time work, or even a full-time job. Those who did not complete secondary school, however, think it preferable for women not to work during this phase.

The story is similar in the case of women whose children have grown up and left home. Women's views in 1994 are a mirror image of men's views in 1988; they have turned much more traditional. The proportion agreeing with full-time employment has declined, for women to 72 per cent, for men to 66 per cent. In both cases the proportion of those who think it right for women in this phase not to go to work has grown. There are significant differences between men and women on the basis of educational background. Thus 80 per cent of women graduates favour full-time employment in this phase, with 16 per cent favouring part-time work. For graduate men, on the other hand, the figures are 64 per cent and 30 per cent respectively. It is noteworthy that even those women without a secondary school leaving certificate are more likely to support full-time work at this stage in life than graduate men.

Since the change of regime Hungary—like all other former socialist states—has had a stronger demand for part-time employment, and a higher proportion of women favouring their withdrawal from wage-earning. So of the alternatives suggested in the introduction, the public would seem most in favour of the two-part work cycle, where women work in the childless phase, then again once the children have grown up. Yet a comparison of attitudes with reality strengthens the impression that the two strongly differ from each other. Our data suggests that a significant proportion of the public is genuinely nostalgic for the lifestyle in which women did not work or only worked part-time. Meanwhile many of those who cannot find work or live at home on childcare allowance feel they would benefit more from going out to work. This inconsistency is one of the most significant potential sources of conflict within Hungarian families.

Motives for women to go to work

The international questionnaire sought opinions on three possible motivations for women to seek employment. Responses could be expressed on a scale of 1 to 5, from complete agreement to complete disagreement. In this analysis "agreement" refers both to "completely agree" and "agree" responses.

It is a widespread belief that the collapse of socialism has left only the financial motive as significant in a woman's decision to find work. This was tested by

asking for responses to the following statement: "Today the majority of working women have to work because their family cannot make ends meet without their income." A high proportion of men and women (90 per cent) agreed with this statement. (This question did not appear in the 1988 questionnaire, so no comparison can be made.) Only graduates thought differently, one in five believing that women do not primarily work because of financial necessity. Even amongst the under-30s, 85 per cent accept this. Our data therefore support the proposition that in Hungary financial necessity really is an exceptionally powerful motivational factor for women seeking employment. We should add that this financial motive is no less strong in all the other post-socialist countries, with the proportion of those agreeing with the above statement above 90 per cent in each of them. This value is slightly lower in Slovenia, where 77 per cent of men and 87 per cent of women consider financial necessity to be the key motive for women seeking work.

The following proposition summarises another possible motivation for women to go out to work: "Employment is the best way a woman can maintain her independence." It is striking that no more than a third of Hungarian interviewees agreed, compared to the other post-socialist states, where a much higher proportion (60–70 per cent) did so. Another characteristic of Hungary is that, unlike the other post-socialist countries, women were no more likely to agree with the proposition than men. Just as our hypothesis suggests, those with the poorest and highest educational qualifications make the strongest connection between female employment and independence. Meanwhile it is precisely those in the oldest age group who are most receptive to this proposition: 48 per cent of women over 68 agree, as opposed to only 27 per cent of women between 18 and 27. The very concept of independence seemingly has a unique meaning to certain classes of Hungarians. We can only guess as to what is the explanation for this. It may be that the younger are the most sensitive to the fact that in Hungary today work does not provide independence in the full sense, given that even in 1994 incomes did not usually provide an adequate living standard. Another answer may be that the word 'independence' had negative connotations for the interviewees, presuming that it referred to women who leave their families, breaking family ties that—despite the high divorce rate—are still highly valued in Hungary. In principle, of course, it is also possible—if hardly likely—that Hungarian women, in contrast to their contemporaries in Western European and other post-socialist countries, feel themselves to be independent even when they do not earn a wage, that is, that Hungary has already experienced the total emancipation of women.

An analysis of women's motivation logically gives rise to the proposition that women (also) find work as a way of achieving self-fulfilment. The questionnaire phrased this idea the other way round, as follows: "Performing the duties of a housewife can offer just as much self-fulfilment to a woman as paid employment." In 1994 half of men and women agreed with this proposition. The older the interviewee and the poorer his or her educational background, the more likely he or she was to accept this. This question divides the post-socialist countries into two quite distinct groups. Those questioned in Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria and Russia saw domestic work as on a par with paid work in terms of self-fulfilment, while those in the former GDR, the Czech Republic and Slovenia did not think it offered the same self-fulfilment.

Employment of women and the family

Having considered sources of motivation for women to go out to work, we now turn to what interviewees thought of the effect that women going out to work had on their families, particularly their children.

One of the questions was directed at the problems facing mothers with children under six. This was expressed in the following proposition: "A child under six will certainly suffer if his or her mother goes to work." As we saw when evaluating the various life phases, this is the stage in life when interviewees favour, with unambiguous unanimity, mothers staying at home. It is no surprise, therefore, that a high proportion accepted this last proposition, three-quarters of both men and women. Support for this view has strengthened since 1988. It is noteworthy that in the youngest age group the proportion who accept this view is even higher in the case of women than in the case of men. (In the 18–27 age group 60 per cent of women and 47 per cent of men agreed with this proposition.) For both sexes, the proportion increases with age (in the over-68 age group 82 per cent of men and 86 per cent of women). For women, educational background has a powerful effect on the level of support for the proposition. Women with no more than a secondary school-leaving certificate are more likely to agree with it than men of a similar background (62 per cent completely agree, 24 per cent generally agree). Acceptance is much lower in the case of graduate women. What is more only one in five agree that it is not automatically damaging for a child under six for his or her mother to go out to work. It seems that we are witnessing a nation-wide feeling of guilt. In Hungary 88 per cent of children between the ages of three and six go to kindergarten; the Education Act requires children to attend school preparation at kindergarten once they are past their fifth birthday. Yet a significant proportion of women feel that their children under the age of six will suffer lasting emotional damage if they go out to work. Amongst the other post-socialist countries this opinion is most characteristic of Bulgaria and Russia; opposing views were found amongst East German, Czech and Slovenian interviewees.

Those who oppose women going out to work argue that this risks damage not only to the child's life but to that of the family as well. The latter notion was expressed in the following proposition: "Family life suffers if the wife works full-time." The proportion of women agreeing with this has grown slightly since 1988 (from 61 per cent to 66 per cent) while that of men has diminished significantly (from 77 per cent to 60 per cent). This means that women are now more likely to support this view than men. This is particularly noticeable in the 18-27 age group, where 54 per cent of women, as opposed to 38 per cent of men, agree with the proposition. The older men are, the more likely they are to agree, the proportion reaching 77 per cent in the over-68 age group. In the case of women responses are similar up to the age of 47, after which the proportion who agree grows suddenly and overtakes that of men. If we exclude the middle-aged, more women support this proposition than men of any age group. There is a striking disparity in the opinion of women depending on their educational background. Amongst women with college or university degrees support for this view has declined since 1988, while for all other groups it has grown. Thus in 1994, 82 per cent of women with no secondary school-leaving certificate thought that full-time work damages family life, but only 28 per cent of graduate women said the same.

The role of women in the labour market has gradually changed over the last fifty years. To begin with, they could only find unskilled work or office jobs, as their average level of education lagged behind that of men. Today half of all university students, and more then half of those completing their secondary education, are female. Sectoral gender segregation is present in Hungary as much as anywhere else, with, for example, 90 per cent of teachers being women. At the same time, a good number of those entering supposedly "male" professions—like medicine, law or engineering—are female. The flow of women into management positions is entirely a post-1989 phenomenon. They normally break into middle management but there are more and more women taking up top executive positions in the burgeoning banking sector.

Evaluations of marriage and the family have undergone a unique transformation in Hungary since the change of regime. In the youngest age group there has been a dramatic growth in the incidence of common law marriage with a concomitant rise in the average age at which people get married, which had previously been distinctly early (early twenties). The birth of every fourth child outside marriage is a new phenomenon. In some of these cases the parents get married later, but public opinion is increasingly ready to accept that mothers can bring up children on their own. Apart from the occasional fluctuation, the divorce rate is consistently high. Trends suggest that a third of marriages in Hungary today will end in divorce.

Nostalgia and guilt

The response of sociologists at home and abroad to the data produced by the 1988 international survey was that, relative to their contemporaries in Western Europe and North America, Hungarian men are distinctly conservative concerning questions related to the employment of women (Harding 1989, Tóth 1991). On most questions it was the opinion of women that changed most drastically between then and 1994, thus partly reversing the trend of men being the more conservative. 1994 has shown Hungarians, in particular Hungarian women, reverting to the paradigm of the housewife who confines her activity to the household. These values can not but be described as conservative. Yet there seems to be no talk of the society-wide two-wage-earner family model being abolished, nor of the proliferation of part-time work, which would seem to represent a widely-adopted panacea for these problems. Thus people have to live with a major discrepancy in their everyday life—between what they consider to be right and what is actually the case. How can we explain the way such attitudes have emerged? There are, no doubt, a whole list of factors behind them. We could perhaps begin with the proposition that in 1994 women felt they could finally express their true beliefs on this issue, no longer being conditioned by the pressures of socialist ideology. This is, however, immediately contradicted by the fact that other similar surveys conducted since 1989 suggest that the young and middle-aged generations of Hungarian women have become firmly adjusted to wage-earning. It looked impossible that "women could be sent back to the kitchen". (Hadas 1994; Vukovich et al, 1994).

If the explanation for such beliefs is not to be found in earlier beliefs being given a new freedom of expression, then we must look for it elsewhere. A significant role must be apportioned to a society-wide feeling of guilt that Hungarian society and ideology has traditionally produced in women. It could already be felt in socialist times that many held women qua social group responsible for the declining birth rate, for the lack of keenness in bringing up children, for just about all the problems arising amongst the young. At the same time as seeing a need for women to earn a wage, society and the family consistently attacked mothers for the irreparable damage they were supposedly causing to their children by doing so. It would be a logical escape from this if women became—or at least thought it right in principle to become—housewives again.

Perhaps the most obvious answer to the change in beliefs is that women have tired of the—by Western standards very significant—strain that simultaneous employment and housekeeping imply. According to household budget data, the nineties in Hungary have been characterized by an outright traditional division of labour within families. The wife does the lion's share of household chores, independent of whether she or her husband go out to work or not. On average, women have an hour less leisure a day than men. This leisure has, in any case, declined in all social groups since the eighties, with economic decline and dwindling living standards forcing the majority of people to perform unaffordable services themselves. The years of the change of regime saw the continuation of a decline in people's ability to avoid doing their own housework. Many women are now obliged to carry out domestic tasks that in the past they could afford to pay others to do. At the same time the family is in need of income, and rising unemployment has meant that it is often the woman who is secure in the receipt of a wage. The majority of jobs require better results from individuals than in the past, and, added to the pressure, affecting women as much as men, there is the fear of unemployment. Given that the change of regime has from this perspective made women's lives much harder, it is no surprise that women favour a lifestyle more relaxed than their present one. This is consistent with the view of most men, who feel that their lives would be made easier if their wives stayed at home.

Of course a large question mark remains over whether, were these desires to be satisfied overnight, allowing women to be housewives would really lead to an easier, happier life for everyone. If this were to happen, a division of labour would arise between the sexes that would in part be similar and in part be different from what we observe today. Men would do the same amount of work at their work place as they do today. True, women would take the burden of housework off their shoulders, thus fully handing over to them the role of the wage-earning patriarchal head of the household, but presumably they would take no greater part in bringing up their children or in family life. Is this what men really want? And would women, freed of the burden of paid employment, really be better mothers and wives? Would it put an end to their guilty conscience? Would looking after the house offer them real long-term satisfaction? Are today's young women, with their rising standards of education, who currently occupy half the country's university places, really just preparing themselves to be housewives? These are some of the questions a sociologist cannot answer just from looking at the data. It would appear that the judgment of society on the employment of women is not yet a fully exhausted subject of research. ❧

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Monika Mária Váradi–Katalin Kovács

Small-town Women

Our report is based on interviews with sixty women, ages 35 to 55, who hold various jobs, have varied backgrounds and are of varied social standing. We interviewed them between July 1995 and March 1996, in Karikás, a market town on the Great Plain.[1]

Surrounded by small farms and with a past as a market town, Karikás in 1990 had only 68 per cent of all active women as wage-earners. It is typical of the local economy that most of the wage-earning women were employed in primary and secondary industries, i.e., 43 per cent in industry, and 10 per cent in agriculture. Commerce only employed 12 per cent of the women, and education, health and other social services employed 30 per cent. 5 per cent worked in other areas. During the Socialist era, the structure of local industry was typically lop-sided. The local food processing plant, providing approximately 3,000 jobs, was the major employer in the town; all the other taken together did not employ anywhere near this number. Here, there were always at least as many women working as men. However, after the 1989 political changes, the plant lost its largest market, the Soviet Union, as well as those central government resources which subsidized Eastern exports.

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For the past five years, the factory has been experiencing grave difficulties. In 1992 two of its divisions were privatized and came under the ownership of foreign holding companies. The central core of the factory, which had seen better days, was privatized in 1994, 49 per cent of the shares being bought by the state and 51 per cent by the managers and the workers.

This section of the factory, which remained in Hungarian ownership, works one or two shifts off-season. In the summer of 1995 it employed 1,100 people full time, 572 of them women. However, the management had not yet taken the most important steps which would restructure the plant; engaged in ensuring survival, they had not then reduced the work force.

In one of the privatized plants the majority of employees was laid off, workers are called in only during high season, when they work in three shifts, including weekends. When the season is over, they apply for unemployment benefits. In October 1992, unemployment benefits were given for eighteen months, which did not have to be consecutive and uninterrupted, but by 1994 and 1995, seasonal workers were no longer eligible for unemployment benefits. In December 1995, the plant in question, which in June 1992 "inherited" 160 employees, employed only 56 people on a permanent basis, 15 women and 41 men. In August 1995, 267 people had been on the payroll. Of these, 56 were in permanent employment, 104 men and 107 women being hired on a seasonal basis.

Prior to the change in regime, in the 80s, the top managerial positions in the local economy were filled by men, while both men and women held political positions. The health and social institutions in Karikás were managed by men. Given the feminization of teaching and clerical work, by 1989 there were more women than men in leading positions in both schools and local government. In fact, at the municipality, all the leading positions were filled by women. After 1990 there were still more women than men in leading positions in the town hall, though the across-the-board "women's reign" was replaced by a "qualified majority".

Among those elected to local political posts, the reverse was the case. In 1989, of the 58 members of the urban council, there were only 13 women, mostly professionals, administrative clerks and medium-level executives. Every party had women candidates, nine in all for the 1990 local government elections. Of the 23 seats (electoral districts were rearranged) four won seats in 1990 and three in 1994. Of the women running for mandate, five in 1990 and eight in 1994 had higher qualifications, including teachers, doctors, lawyers, economists and engineers. The rest worked for the city as medium-level executives and administrators. The larger number of men in both the 1990 and 1994 elections is, to an extent, saddening; compared to the 1980s, there were far fewer women in local government.

The political arena

The most interesting of the politically active women is in her sixties and was the first president of the newly reorganized (1989) conservative Smallholders' Party, and later its secretary. She was successful in both elections. She is the sole woman on the local political scene who holds a leading position in her party, and who, according to the other members, is the party's "motor". In the world in which she grew up, *"there was an established order, everyone knowing where they belonged, and where breaking away was rare, because it entailed enormous conflict."* This established order dictated that a woman who came from a well-to-do farming

family must marry someone from her own class. According to this order, a girl who finished eight years of school and the subsequent household management course for women, would have lived the rest of her life as a farmer's wife. However, hardly a year after the wedding, in 1952, everything they had was taken away, the father was imprisoned. Overnight the young wife became a manual labourer in a factory, a "kulak whore", who was hidden by her fellow-workers during the occasional visits of the Communist Party secretary. *"I am proud. They pulled the wealth from under the feet of my generation, we had to make do as best we could—and we survived."*

The first step in getting ahead led to music school. This woman, who had learned to read music at school and had taken lessons on the flute for ten years, was for a long time the only female in the factory orchestra. Her advancement also involved further schooling, from vocational training school through higher education, from the factory through the position of deputy director of the school which trained skilled labour for the factory. Her marriage, which followed the dictates of the old social order, ended in divorce, but the sense of duty and respect for promises made remained, along with dependability and reliability. As she said, *"You could set a clock by me."* The change in regime was a compensation of sorts, *"an elevating experience, it has made me feel like a complete human being"*. She has been able to start her life anew time and time again. After helping her *"modest, dutiful"* daughter become independent, she remarried at the age of 49, this time of her own free will, and out of love. This politician-turned woman, a true workaholic, bony faced, spare, with masculine features, did not deny that her interests and way of life are not traditionally feminine, at least not according to local standards. *"I was not cut out to be either a mother or a housewife. I am better at public life and teaching. I resemble my father, and not only physically. When I was born, they were expecting a boy."* As a politician she feels estranged from the work and debating style of her male counterparts. As she said, *"I am not a politician by nature. I am too peaceable. The political battles and the basically drastic, rough, manly squabbles shock me."*

Of the women in agriculture, two were running on the Smallholders' ticket, and a third sympathized with the party. They are true smallholders, women who had to restart their lives, and whose sense of justice is satisfied by the *"security that comes from property owned and regained"*. They are representatives of the people directly targeted in their district by the Smallholders' Party. Nevertheless, only a small number of peasants are politically committed and active, and those in the upper middle-class are only moderately interested in politics. Manual labourers and lower white-collar workers find politics of no interest; they rarely even watch the television news.

In Socialist times, party membership was a matter of course for the middle cadres of factories, and a *sine qua non* for advancement. Three of the women spoke cogently about this. They said that at the time they felt "honoured" when they were asked to join, and have fond memories of the atmosphere at the compulsory party seminars. *"There was the shift overseer, the team foreman, and the workers. So in this small family in which you were working, you were together, and you could talk to them."* Yet after 1989, none of these women joined any of the organizations that grew out of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party; nor did those working class women who had not felt particularly "honoured" when, under pressure by their

team leader, they joined the Party along with all the others working in their shift. *"Some came from very religious families, and said, 'I'm sorry Magdika, but I'm not joining, my family will disown me.' At which [the group leader] said, 'Look, Marika, we're not telling a soul, just join.' The poor thing, she even cried. She [the group leader] was determined to get rid of anyone in her shift who didn't join. And in the end she was awarded the Hero of Socialist Labour title, because she showed how she could turn every soul under her wing into a partisan. I was so angry at Party meetings—hardly aware where I was. And we were young, we had better things to do, the sun was shining, but there we were, for an hour and a half or thereabouts, because we had to be there, there were lots of other things to attend to, and so we said, for goodness' sakes, why must I waste an hour and a half on this ridiculous nonsense."*

The lack of political interest among the manual labourers and white-collar workers stems from two factors. Neither political activity nor strong religious beliefs could be said to have characterized the poor rural peasants' and town-dwelling manual labourers' background from which these women came. At the same time, white-collar workers are not targeted by party rhetoric of whatever colouring, and there is no party on the Hungarian political scene which the workers think of as a working man's party. *"Well, I was expecting that it wouldn't be any worse for us. But then came democracy. You know... And then came this Socialist Party, I was waiting for it to happen, the long and short of it is, I voted for them. I thought maybe they'd want what we had before. But why is it grinding people into the shit? But the worst of it is... not those on top, it's always those already down who go further down, on and on."*

With the change in regime, these people, coming from a poor peasant and working class background, lost their security. Compared to the poverty they had known in childhood, late-Kádár Socialism was a boom; they felt a sense of security, that *"it was worth all the work"*, and that *"if you work hard enough, you will go up in the world." "Basically, we're not working any more than we did before, in the factory. Before, it was much more difficult, because there was more physical work... but you did it... till you dropped, you'd have done the work for the whole plant alone, because it was worth it... We weren't tired emotionally, just physically... We worked, and joked, and sweated, but with good cheer."*

Things have drastically changed. For most working families, the main problem is survival. They are afraid that they will be reduced to the level of their parents 40 or 50 years ago. The fact that these insecure and frightened labourers and white-collar workers now have a small share-holding in their own workplace, has done nothing to alleviate their fears. Instead of feeling that the factory is theirs, the opposite is the case; they feel they have less to do with it than ever, because not only the majority of the shares, but all the essential information, too, remains in the hands of the management. They say that the divide between them and the management is growing by leaps and bounds.

For the manual labourers and white-collar workers, post-1989 society suffered from a great divide not only in a financial sense, with a small number of the newly rich and a large number of those who are growing poorer; they also feel that within the new order of things, work counts for nought, nor does it guarantee even the humblest of living standards. *"When I look around,"* one woman said, *"I feel sad, because I never learned how to do anything else but work. That's how I grew up, it's what I know. I thought I could earn a living*

that way. And now all I hear is you've got to go into business. But I'm not cut out for that. Even if I had any capital, I'm not one of your clever schemers. I'm not enterprising enough to start something. What I wanted, what I still want, basically, is to make a living doing a job of work. Some people are born for that. Not everybody's good at business, but this system, it humiliates the worker."

Women's lives

In Karikás, during the 60s, women from poor families living off agriculture had two new options. One led to the factory and life as a factory worker and was generally taken by those girls who, after completing elementary school or after spending a couple of years at home after school, joined the work force. Their mothers did not usually encourage them, but did not discourage them either; the family needed the money, and they contributed a part of their wages, at least, to the household. Families from the poor peasantry usually lived off one wage-earner, either because the mother stayed at home to take care of the house and family, or because the father had deserted the family, and the mother had to find employment. In either case, what the girls would bring home made a difference. *"In 1966 I earned 1,900 forints a month. Then when I got the money, my mother said, where'd you get the money, child? Did you steal it, she says."*

After several years, the local factory sent unskilled girls for training. Others obtained their qualification while they were on maternity leave. Factory women who came from peasant or poor working-class families also followed this. With the exception of those women who worked the machines, becoming a skilled worker did not necessarily bring advancement or better type of work. Still, everyone wanted to become a skilled worker, even at the cost of great sacrifice. *"Skilled workers, even if they just held a broom handle in their hand, well, they had a guaranteed hourly wage. Not the posh work, the money mattered."*

For the children of homesteaders, town-dwelling labourers and smallholder peasants, the other road led—after finishing a local secondary school—into the white-collar world of employment by central or local government, though this was, as a rule, preceded by several years of manual labour in the factory or elsewhere. The number of courses could seem endless, beginning with Marxist-Leninist evening school. These were mostly attended by women who did not marry immediately, and therefore, not having a family to look after and "plenty of time on their hands", they were the obvious choice for "volunteering" to attend political training courses. *"I added it up. I spent seventeen years without a break studying while I was working. With the same effort I could've gone to university."*

Those who worked in the factory as senior clerks and accountants, shift-managers and laboratory assistants had only finished secondary school, as they lacked the ambition or the financial resources to continue their education. However, a secondary-school certificate sufficed only for employment as an unskilled worker. Those women who finished secondary school began their working lives in factories on the same rung of the ladder as those who finished only elementary school. They had to take a skilled labour test, but they generally also acquired some sort of training as technicians, as a result of which their wages and positions also saw a gradual improvement.

Self-employed women, entrepreneurs and top-level public servants

The careers of entrepreneurs and top-level administrative staff provide a different picture. With few exceptions, they come mostly from urban backgrounds and from families of artisans, traders or clerks, or else the well-to-do peasantry, families in which half of the mothers were active wage-earners. The careers of these top-level clerical staff and entrepreneurs are also similar in that most of them received their secondary school and university diplomas as full-time students. Step-by-step advancement is typical of these women, nor did they have to start their careers at the lowest rungs of the ladder. The women who fill upper clerical or administrative positions began their working lives as simple clerks, teachers or librarians, and only after acquiring a second diploma or other "papers" did they rise to the position of office manager, registrar, or the head of a library. During the last two decades of Socialism, this was the typical way of career building.

In order to start a life as entrepreneurs, this new breed of women was, by definition, forced to change not only their view of the world, but their lifestyles. This was equally true of those former co-operative or state employees who continued in their occupations as beauticians, hairdressers, chemists or notaries—except now as self-employed women—in the hopes that by retaining their clientele, they could enjoy a higher income. This is also true of those who joined "ready-made" private businesses. In these cases, a family or one or two of its members began the private business—as gardeners, or private dentists—while keeping their full-time jobs, then as circumstances dictated or allowed, they were joined by other members of the family, in full employment in the family venture. Though having a "regular job" produces only a small income, the great majority of families try to keep such jobs in order to ensure a stable source of income. For the same reason, most doctors or dentists continue to pursue private practice only "on the side".

In the majority of cases, starting their own business was not the result of a private decision. Most women were under serious pressure. A hairdresser, cosmetician or notary public, who had previously worked in a co-operative or for a state enterprise, had no choice but to go private, and to set up business in a shop or office, whether bought outright, or rented. The head of a pharmacy had a choice, at least; she could either step down a rung or two to become an employee of a new owner, or keep her status by becoming the owner of the pharmacy herself. After much deliberation, it is only natural that she should choose the second, if it was within her means.

Most of the entrepreneurs turned to private enterprise only after the change in regime; only one woman who owns a boutique and one who has a flower shop were in business before 1989. One other woman, the wife of the present mayor of the town, had started a commercial garden as a family enterprise at the side of her husband. She now runs it full time. The other women who went into private business after 1989, are newcomers to the world of private enterprise. In recent years, one such woman, along with her husband, became the heroine of a post-socialist success story. She is a dentist who—though she officially continues her private practice and is a member of the Medical Association—has joined her husband, a dental technician, and an Austrian businessman, and opened a Volkswagen showroom in 1991. The business has grown by leaps and bounds, and now employs eighty. The Austrian partner had been the shooting

companion of the dentist's father, and since he was in Hungary anyway to shoot game, he went to the dentist's private surgery and paid a fragment of the fee customary in Austria. This is how he and the dentist and technician met. The three hold equal shares and have equal standing in the business. Until now, the Austrian partner was in charge of investment, while the husband supervised car sales; the dentist is in charge of bank affairs and is a *"personnel director"* of sorts. She also deals with clients and VW headquarters, when the need arises. *"I have had no problems so far,"* she says, *"getting done whatever needed to be done."* Then she adds, by way of explanation, *"I'm better at dealing with people than my husband, who as a technician is used to working on his own."* Nor is their post-socialist achievement diminished by the fact that they started with good "connections", experience in the private business sphere and—needless to say—with sufficient capital.

The success of such enterprises was bolstered not only by the expertise of the new entrepreneurs and a clientele brought over from the old regime, but by the families' financial and moral support as well. Behind almost every new business venture there stands appreciable help from parents. This is doubly true in the case of women entrepreneurs, who continue to receive parental support in the form of money, work, or the care of their children. It is also these business women who have the largest network of acquaintances, and who play their part in supporting their families on an equal footing with their husbands.

Forms of social contact

Celebrating the name day of relatives, friends and fellow-workers is the most important event in the social life of this town. These occasions, coupled with Christmas and New Year's Eve, offered, on the average, eight to then occasions a year for someone to get together with friends and relatives, and within the context of enjoying a good meal, to talk about affairs. Such social get togethers, which used to be most popular among the better-to-do, are now dwindling in number, and have become more prevalent within the upper and middle levels of senior administrators and entrepreneurs. Those women who are not amongst the latter now celebrate their name day only with their families, or by combining various occasions and celebrating them together. Some blame the worsening of the family's finances, others the lack of time due to their business affairs; one way or another, they are spending less time and money on social gatherings.

In contrast to entrepreneurs, civil servants and white-collar workers, working-class women always had slender ties with their brothers and sisters, and their families in general. *"They all had their own problems,"* as one of them explains. By now, most of the working women have lost one or both of their parents. They were also those who most often mentioned suicide, alcoholism and unemployment among their brothers and sisters. These women could not count on help from the family, whether their own, or their spouses'. Under the circumstances, it is understandable that good relations with neighbours became of paramount importance. Good relations with one's neighbours were especially important while a family had small children; the woman next door could often be counted on to mind the children in exchange for a little cash or perhaps work in her garden. Divorced working mothers usually had no one but a neighbour to turn to for help; in the large housing estates, it was a neighbour who was asked to mind the children while the mother was working, especially on night shift, or if she had to stay in hospital.

Besides the lamentable lack of family support, the lives of working women of a working-class background are also haunted by the instability of their relationships. Half of the women are divorced; some of them have gone through several marriages. Only two women spoke of their husbands as people they could rely on and make plans with. *"As I say, we had a good crowd of women at the factory. I don't know, but people paid more attention to each other somehow. For instance, when we were on night shift, and everybody was tired and sleepy, they'd start singing. The machines make a lot of noise, but we'd outsing them and we'd feel better, and the sleepiness was gone from the eyes, and I haven't heard anything that good since."* While the women were young and the factory was doing well, there were no problems. Even after the women were married and had children, their close relationship with their immediate peers at the factory remained intact; they celebrated each other's name day, and they had legendary meals where they'd cook huge quantities of tripe. They organized joint family outings and summer holidays—all this with support from the factory, which lent them its buses and provided cheap holidays in its holiday homes. Despite the fact that sometimes the women would have to work three shifts, the families would nevertheless get together five or six times a year. With worsening living conditions, this has become a thing of the past.

The radical changes in the factory, especially the laying off of people, has also done its share in destroying close friendships. Everyone is anxious. *"Everyone here is anxious about her job and makes sure the others won't learn how to run the machine she's working on.There's a lot of jealousy."* After people were laid off, the women no longer trusted each other. *"We're even afraid of each other now, we're worried the other might go to the management and tell on us. Also, they accused somebody of stealing, because she had some liver spread in her bag, and she was fired... This was a good reason to get rid of people. And then people started to be afraid of each other, of somebody going to the guard at the gate and spilling the beans. We ended up checking our bags to make sure nobody put anything inside."* Now, the women do not feel like getting together any more. *"If you're in trouble, you keep it to yourself, because when you look round, all you see is misery anyway."*

In Karikás, official representation is not yet taken seriously. Even at the ball to benefit the new hospital neither of the two MPs turned up in 1996. The guests sat by long tables, each of which could accommodate sixty. People sat with friends, each group of friends being made up of anywhere from four to ten close acquaintances. It did not occur to anyone to plan the seating with a view to the prestige or rank of the guests, but in 1996, this was only the fifth formal function of its kind to benefit the hospital. Of the women we knew, we saw only six at this benefit ball. Of these, five are entrepreneurs and high-ranking officials; the sixth looked very much out of place. Next to us sat a young couple who have three children. The woman is a school teacher, her husband is a skilled worker who, after a period of unemployment, is now employed as an unskilled hand. Our fortuitious proximity among nearly four hundred guests was a sign that this couple belonged to the fringe of the new town elite, which was still in the process of taking more definite shape.

It seems that those women who, thanks to their own or their husbands' high positions in local business and politics, belong to the elite, are not particularly impressed by the fact that they can become active participants in the social life of the community. They do not make an effort to act the part by their husbands' side, either be-

cause their tastes or convictions run contrary to the loud and gruff man's world of such evenings, or because their new role as the wife of an "important" person makes them feel uneasy, even ashamed. Others go with their husbands, but go there in their own independent interest. It is partly due to these women that the elite of Karikás has not yet taken shape, and is, at the moment, no more than a loose, mosaic-like mass of political and financial interests based on family relationships and friendships. Another contributing factor to this lack of an identifiable elite is that the local elite is first generation, which means that the families who belong to it have very varied life-styles, origins and habits, as well as highly diverse career histories.

The wife of the town's mayor, who has a university degree, is an energetic, ambitious woman who comes from a family of poor artisants. She left her job with the local government in 1992 in order to run the family market garden. She was also a force behind her husband running for political office, because she hoped that through her husband she could participate in public life once again, perhaps even go back to work, because she had become isolated. She works day and night in the garden. Her three daughters, who are university students, can lend a hand only in the summer, while her husband can only look after the business aspects and offer his know-how. She employs no one; *"nobody can work as quickly and as well as I can,"* she says. Still, this woman likes to socialize; she dances at balls and has a word with everyone if she can; everything interests her that happens in Karikás. To her, work and achievement are important because she wants to augment the family income and ensure an appropriate life-style for her husband and daughters, and also because she craves the acknowledgement of her husband and those around her. This she gets: *"She works like the very devil!"* they say of her.

One of the managers in the local elite is a third-generation manager who comes from a family of highly-respected local professionals. Besides his financial and political activities, he is best known for managing the sports life of the community. He is rarely seen at formal functions with his wife. They met when she was an administrator at the factory and he a top manager. Now she is loathe to be in company because at the time their marriage created a stir and *"plenty of bad talk",* and filled the town with rumours. The major decisions in her life were always taken by her husband, ten years her senior; it was upon his advice that she first went into business, then became an administrator, and finally, a housewife. She now takes care of their home, drives her child around, attends various courses, and goes to the theatre with her friends. She considers herself happy and satisfied.

Another member of the local business elite and his wife do not attend social functions for yet another reason. The man, a former engineer and the child of a civil servant and a school teacher, is in his mid-forties and is now an executive. His wife, also a school teacher, grew up in a family of Calvinist ministers. They settled in Karikás soon after they were married. The husband, who does not take an active part in local politics, is nevertheless known for his conservative views and Calvinist beliefs. His wife is one of the few people who stood by her religious convictions in Communist times, and it was the strength of her religious convictions that brought her husband into the Church. It is due to her that they number several clerical families among their closest friends. This woman lives an active, yet a private life; her secrets, *"the convergencies of the soul,"* are revealed only in her dark-toned paintings which she began to work on only a few years ago.

Feminine spheres

Most of the women want to satisfy at least three requirements: they want to work, they want households of quality, and they want to be able to help support their children. Married women and women living with a man must also satisfy a fourth self-designated requirement, namely, they want to please their spouses. More than half of the women failed in this regard.

Working women usually divorced because their husbands drank too much, were aggressive, and womanized. These women did not remarry, though most of them tried living with various men, but these men, like their husbands, were also drinkers and aggressive. *"I had some tough fellows in my time,"* one of them says, *"but I held my own. I have a big mouth."* This woman continues to live with her present partner out of the goodness of her heart. The man, unreliable, womanizing, suffered a serious accident and was forced to stop work. He has quietened down since then, even helping around the house. *"I haven't got the heart to throw him out, or walk out on him, I just couldn't do it,"* the woman says, even though she is in love with someone else. This new, secret love gives her some emotional security, at least; those working-class women who have been living alone for nearly twenty years don't even have that.

Single mothers of working-class background had a very difficult time bringing up their children. Year after year, they would work at night and on weekends, and would take on odd jobs during the day. *"We've got to work, so there's no time for a private life. We don't even feel like it any more. We come home dead tired, do the housework, and are glad when we can go to bed and rest."* In the lives of these women, the struggle to make ends meet and to bring up their children go hand in hand with unstable relationships. They do not even know the meaning of happiness. *"The poor can't even be happy,"* one woman explains. *"The lack of money causes so much stress, a woman might think she's happy, but sooner or later, you can bet your life there's a fight over money. She might buy something, for instance, because she's happy, then there won't be enough money at home, and sooner or later, that means trouble. And in today's world, money comes first. First money, then happiness."*

Top white-collar working women divorced for different reasons, and in every case, it was they who started proceedings. Every one of these women married out of love. They wanted to be good wives and good mothers, and to have a career at the same time. They could not go on living with their husbands as they prevented them from pursuing their own careers, or were not "partners" in their lives, by which they meant that the husbands should help with small children and support their wives in their professional ambitions. On the other hand, these women did not tolerate their husbands' pastimes, the drinking bouts with friends after soccer games, the card games that stretched into the early hours, instances where the husband *"took out the garbage in the afternoon and didn't come back till eleven at night, because he went drinking with the boys"*—a situation which was tolerated least of all when the women felt bound hand and foot, especially if this occurred because of the husband's wishes, or because they were rearing small children.

"When I was married," one woman explained, *"my husband wouldn't allow anybody near me, regardless of whether this was a man, a woman, or one of our friends. He only cared about goulash and white shirts. My whole life revolved around making tasty variations of goulash, and baby food for the children. In the end I was so*

angry and tired, I couldn't eat." Another woman told us, *"When my little girl was born, I said, well, I ended up bringing another servant into the world! Because if you're a wife, you are promoted to a hotel maid. 'Clean clothes, warm cunt,' that's what they say that men want."*

Both of the women just quoted had small children when they were divorced. Though they were not willing to be the servant of their husbands, they didn't mind taking care of their children, and in this they were supported by their parents. Of the four children they had between them (two children each), three were graduates, and the fourth travelled the world, a photographer, a real lad *"taking after his mother"*. When they were young, both women were the apples of their fathers' eye, and both their mothers were housewives. These fathers gave their daughters a sense of direction, and it is also thanks to them that both these women have an admirable amount of self-confidence. Their mothers continued what they had always done: to give their all in the service of their families—and by now, the families of their daughters as well. Well over seventy, they continue to do so to this day.

After their failed marriages, six of the middle-class women hoped to find new husbands, and have done so. Five even say that they are happy and satisfied. They are independent and self-assured women whose present partners are not put off by this fact, since they are also either professionals or entrepreneurs—men with careers of their own. Still, it was they who accommodated themselves to the lifestyles of their small new families. As one woman said, *"I have a really supportive partner, who tries his best in everything... When we ended up together, my mornings were terrible with the two small children. They were going to kindergarten, which meant they had to be on time, but one's shoe-laces came apart, the other poured cocoa over himself. And I was very nervous. In short, I have bad memories of those mornings. And when we ended up together, I said, I'm easy to get along with, but in the morning I'm nervous. There's so much to do, I can't cope. And then he took over all the morning chores from me. Making breakfast, making the beds, he does all the morning's chores to this day."*

Most of the women take it for granted that they must bear most of the burden. Most consider housework to be the responsibility of the wife, especially if the husband is working. They push off some of the house chores to their spouses only if the latter has retired, but is still capable of helping around the house. This is all the more necessary, because with a disabled husband, the wife must also support the family. *"My husband sees that I'm responsible now for supporting us, while he feels helpless, so why should I hurt him? He's so happy if the hens lay ten or twenty eggs, he brings them in his hand, counts them over and over, I take them to the factory, sell them and bring back the money, and he feels he's done something. He needs praise and reassurance, so he'll feel he's needed. A woman's got to be diplomatic. I don't know where I get the energy. But I have no choice."*

In this town, only the well-to-do housewives are spared all the housework, though even in their case this is not because they can share the burden of housework with their husbands. Even if they have a maid or helper, cooking and washing the dishes still remains their job, since such work is regarded as a *"women's work"*. At most the husbands help with the shopping; in some cases, they might help with the weekly cleaning. Only six of the women interviewed said that their husbands could cook and even iron if they must, but only one does any cooking, twice a week, and even then *"he doesn't break his back doing it"*. *"If*

I go home and see frankfurters on the table, that's a sure sign it's Tuesday," says a happily married business woman. *"Once my husband put frankfurters on the table on Monday, and my son turned to him and said, 'Daddy, you made a mistake, it's Monday, not Tuesday!'"*

Though they may not necessarily want to stay home and be housewives, the women belonging to the middle financial stratum tend to talk about the traditional male and female roles with a sense of nostalgia. They mention the hot food waiting for them when they came home from school, and the waiting grandmother, and lament the fact that since men are no longer the sole supporters of the family, they have been degraded to simple "comrades in arms". On the other hand, the women working in the factory never experienced this traditional model in action, either as children or as adults. In the past they had no fathers to support them, now they have no one, not even "comrades in arms". As far as they are concerned, their only expectation from a man is that he make money and not leave the hard physical work to them. *"At my younger sister's there's no water in the house, and my poor sister, she's got to carry the water in jugs in and out, while her husband sits watching TV... And if she's prepared a meal, he won't even bother to take it out of the fridge to warm it up. It's brutal, it's plain brutal. We were saying just the other day that given a choice, we'd rather do men's work from time to time than always having to do women's work, working non-stop... And I said, if I were a man, I'd give them what-for, the way they've treated us women."*

Perspectives

Of those we interviewed, it is the entrepreneurs and top civil servants who *"came out ahead"* after the 1989 change in regime. Not only were they able to take advantage of the new opportunities, but they were also able to help their children continue their education. It was among these two groups that we found the six families who were able to help their children buy their first homes.

Those women who have finished secondary school are more likely to want their children to go into tertiary education. One couple, both entrepreneurs, who never went to college, have made this the top priority in their lives. They raise plants and flowers and own several flower shops, the result of long and dedicated efforts on their part, but even now they can ensure a proper living only by working day and night. They are among those who want to save their own children from this much hard work and the burden of financial uncertainty, and hope that their two daughters will go to law school. The older girl, who finished *gimnázium* in 1996, is an excellent student and speaks two foreign languages, but her mother is worried. In order to expand the family business, they sold their flat situated in a housing project, and bought a peasant's house in the heart of town with enough space for a flower shop. However, renovations cost more than they had expected and could not be finished before winter, so they ended up living with the wife's mother for several months instead of the planned couple of weeks. In order to assure proper conditions for their older daughter, who was preparing for her law school entrance exams, the parents took out a loan, something they would have never done otherwise, not even for their own business. *"I know that the terms are very unfavourable, the interest is astronomical, but I don't want [the renovation] to drag on, because if my daughter isn't admitted because of this, I'll go mad... I'll think it was because of this [the renova-*

tion]. Her books are in crates, and she has to go to borrow them, running to the library all the time..."

In the working-class families, most of the children follow in the tracks of their parents. At best, they finish a trade school, then start work at an early age. It is considered going up in the world if a girl is trained to be a saleswoman, hairdresser, or bookkeeper, something which frees her from having to work in the factory and from heavy manual work. *"When she finished eighth grade,"* one woman says of her daughter, *"I took her to the factory. She came and she liked it, and they liked her. But then, it's just as I say, poor thing, she was dead tired. Oh, she was so tired!... And then she kept saying, oh, mum, I won't have to, will I, and I said, see Erika, that's the difference between work and study. You go and study!"* Subsequently, the girl went to a trade school.

In a group comprised of white-collar factory workers, civil servants and women in health care, five families have children who either continued their education, or are doing so now, two boys and three girls. Four are learning a trade, though typically, they are working, too, which means that they are taking correspondence courses. The only one to attend day school, a girl, ended up in a food industry trade school. This means that her training will be extremely specialized, applicable only in a very limited sphere—if she will be lucky enough to get a job at all. In the short run, it won't even spare her the bitter three-shift job that had made her mother suffer so much. Her continued education places a heavy burden on the family; her father is disabled, and had to retire, while her mother is working in the factory lab. *"The reason I'm so desperate and bitter,"* her mother says, *"is because I keep it all to myself... that she needs another 1,000 forints for books, and also some for transport, and the rent's got to be paid, her tuition's got to be paid. I don't cry, and I don't turn on Pista [her husband], saying, where's it going to come from? So I just pull myself together, my last bit of strength, so we can help Ági, no matter what. Because it mustn't happen... her having to leave school, because that would kill me. She deserves a chance to study. She's got to study. Maybe she'll have a better future. Maybe in the long run, the investment will pay off, because this is our investment [in her future]."*

Whether they are manual workers, administrators or laboratory workers, the children of the women employed by the factory have the least secure futures. *"My only wish is that I be able to buy my child a home, so he can start his life at last. This is my only wish."* However, there is no financial background, no savings, nothing that could act as security for the education or financial support of the children of these factory workers. The women have no one to rely on but themselves; they cannot count on their parents or siblings for help, nor, most of the time, even their partners. After nearly thirty years of working shifts, they are physically and emotionally worn out. After their children are hopefully *"off to a good start,"* they have but one dream, *"a quiet, happy old age. I don't think that's asking for too much,"* one of the women said, *"I don't want to have to work in the factory when I am 62. If I have to work longer, if we can't go into early retirement, and on top of that maybe fall ill, that's going to be an added problem, not to mention the fact that if we fall ill, that's going to be a problem for our children, too. Because then I'll have nobody but them to rely on... I don't know if I will ever have a quiet old age. I am very much afraid that I won't."* ❧

Miklós Szabó

Kádár's Pied Piper

Sándor Révész: *Aczél és korunk* (Aczél and Our Age), Budapest, Sík Kiadó, 1997, 436 pp.

Kádár held office as General Secretary of the Communist Party and was de facto ruler far longer than anyone else in twentieth-century Hungary. This era dragged on from 1956 until 1988. Kádár may well be regarded as the most successful "people's democratic dictator". He was able to make adjustments to the system out of line with Kremlin policy and to extend the country's Western contacts while avoiding any actual clash with the Moscow leadership. The West, on the other hand, was able to maintain markedly good relations with a "people's democracy", accepting the latter's non-conformity by Moscow's standards, and yet still avoid a confrontation with Moscow. Kádár's Hungary spared Western governments the embarrassment of having to choose between détente and support for the independence aspirations of a people. Kádár took care to be supported discretely and inconspicuously, something which was impossible for Yugoslavia, Albania or Romania. Hungary, therefore, was much preferred as a partner for the West to those making loud noises of independence and irritating the Russian bear by pulling "irresponsible" faces at it. Yet having crushed the 1956 Revolution, the Kádár regime had started out as an utterly lawless and authoritarian regime, a position from which it succeeded in acquiring the reputation of the Communist regime with the most moderate policies.

A Kádár memorial, if it were a sculptural group with Kádár at the centre, would have two supporting figures, both of whom made major personal and creative contributions to the development of the peculiar features of Hungarian goulash communism. One would be György Aczél, definitely closer to the centre, the subject of the book under review, the other the regime's chief agricultural policy-maker, Lajos Fehér. For artists and intellectuals, their relationship to the regime for almost the entire period was practically synonymous with their relationship—a personal relationship for many—with György Aczél.

The title "Aczél and Our Age", a take-off of the clichéd biography title, is meant to hint that the protagonist had a decisive influence on the age in which we lived, and also implies that the era, in many respects, continues to survive under current conditions.

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György Aczél was born as Henrik Appel in 1917 in a working-class district in Budapest. He came from a grindingly poor Jewish family, whose members were drifters and proletarians barely clinging to a more or less respectable existence. He grew up in orphanages, mainly in that of the Jewish community. His way from there led rather self-evidently to Zionism and on to the Communist Party, outlawed, persecuted and barely kept going by its few members between the two World Wars. The Left-Zionist movement in Hungary was used by the Communists as one of their cover organizations.

Aczél, like so many Communist activists, was completely self-taught. He tried his hand at acting without formal training. He was well read, mainly in fiction and poetry, though his reading was unsystematic. In 1944, he was active in the tiny Communist underground resistance but was chiefly concerned with saving Jews regardless of their politics. In 1945, Aczél, little influenced by Jewish religious traditions anyway, saw assimilation as the only way for Hungarian and Communist Jews, and rejected emigration, bi-culturalism and all other possible options. He saw assimilation as an escape from anti-Semitism, retaining, nevertheless, a marked sensitivity regarding anti-Semitism all his life. Between 1945 and 1948, the years of the quasi-democratic republic that temporarily survived under Soviet occupation, he worked as a Communist apparatchik in various parts of the country, and was highly successful.

With the beginning of the Cold War in 1948, the Sovietization of the "people's democracies" also started, and was swiftly followed by a series of show trials. When the break with Yugoslavia became final, László Rajk, a member of the party's top leadership, was put on trial on the trumped-up charge of being an agent of Tito's planted inside the Hungarian leadership in an attempt to demonstrate the wide dimensions of the new threat. The alleged key meeting between Rajk and Ranković, the Yugoslav Interior Minister, was supposed to have taken place at a section of the border in the county of which Aczél was the Party Secretary. It being only natural that the county secretary should have been involved, Aczél was dragged into the case, arrested and convicted. One of the worst experiences he went through while in prison was violence he suffered at the hands of fellow prisoners who had been fascists.

The development of the attitudes of Aczél, released in 1954 as part of the thaw after Stalin's death, is subtly analysed by Révész. Aczél found it shocking that even during the wave of rehabilitations following the thaw, the leaders of his party showed no haste in freeing their comrades. Covering up what had happened was evidently far more important to them. Aczél's prison experiences produced in him a veritable Arrow Cross phobia. It was his absolute conviction that fascism was still existing, and a highly virulent political force. He felt that the regime would be unable to rid itself of its Stalinist past unless it made the real history of the show trials public and punished those responsible—without that, it could all happen again—but he was also afraid that, if the cleansing really took place, the regime might become compromised to an extent which would leave only the extreme right as a political force untarnished by all that happened. As he saw it, the country had a choice between continued Stalinism or fascist restoration. To avoid this dilemma, Aczél at first did not want to return to the arena. The 1956 Revolution, however, once again confirmed his paranoid fear of the fascist threat. After the crushing of the Revolution by the Soviet intervention of

November 4, 1956, he joined Kádár's collaborationist regime, supporting a Communist dictatorship which he saw as the only force capable of resisting attempts at a fascist restoration. His other objective, however, was to do all in his power to abort a possible full return to Stalinism.

Aczél favoured a line aimed at driving the Stalinists out of the camp of the new regime's supporters, while taking over as much of the policies of Imre Nagy—the Revolution's Prime Minister—as was possible. In the debates within the Party leadership, Aczél urged that Imre Nagy be included in the new leadership and allowed to found a new Peasant Party, and he also suggested the withdrawal of Soviet troops and their replacement by Yugoslav and "Gomulkaist" Polish troops, to ensure the elimination of the counter-revolutionary threat and, to guarantee the survival of socialism while the country could become neutral.

When all this turned out to be an illusion, he was not among those few members of the early Kádár leadership who had been followers of Imre Nagy, and who—because of their insistence on demands of a similar kind—were expelled from the leadership. One of the reasons that he was allowed to stay on may have been his efforts to strengthen the position of rehabilitated politicians in the new leadership. Early on it had been unacceptable to Moscow that in Poland and Hungary the rehabilitated survivors of show trials should be returned to leading positions after 1954. On November 4, 1956, it was the rehabilitated Kádár who became the head of the collaborationist government and Party, and there were several other rehabilitated persons on the second and third levels of leadership. Aczél also intended to support Kádár in the internal struggle in the leadership between the Stalinists and the rehabilitated.

A conflict developed (once again behind the scenes) over the judgement of the role of the Rákosi leadership and over the retaliation policies. The Stalinists demanded full-scale reprisals, while the Kádár leadership wanted to limit reprisals and punishment to those who had taken up arms. They wanted to spare the influential writers, artists and scientists who had played a major role in paving the way toward the revolution if they, in turn, were ready to stop organizing resistance. They wanted to calm these intellectuals rather than terrorize them.

In 1957, attempts were made to put on trial the most influential workers' council or Party organizers, those who were considered key figures. At the same time, about a quarter of the "minor" wrongdoers were imprisoned, more or less at random, without any real selection, mainly to set an example. By early 1958, those concerned began to sense that having escaped punishment so far, they were no longer in danger. This method of pacification appeared very successful: the examples were enough for those who got away to show them what they had succeeded in avoiding, thus ensuring they would appreciate their good luck.

In the first half of 1957, great efforts were made by the Stalinists to extend the scope of reprisals. The struggle was decided in Moscow. The defeat of the Molotov-Kaganovich group helped those around Kádár in the Hungarian leadership to victory, since the Hungarian Stalinists were regarded by the Khrushchev leadership as the allies of Molotov and Co. It also meant that Kádár had won the trust of Khrushchev who, from then on, was no longer troubled by the fact that the Hungarian leadership was headed by rehabilitated politicians. The battle between the Stalinist and Kádárist wings within the Hungarian Party leadership was brought to

a head at the Party conference in the summer of 1957 and ended with the complete victory of Kádár. From that time on, Kádár and his group no longer had to fear that Khrushchev might replace them by Rákosi and Gerő because of the relative mildness—by Moscow standards, that is—of the reprisals (ten thousand executions had been "advised" by Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, regarded as Moscow's spokesman, when he was on a visit to Budapest.) According to rumours seized upon eagerly and diligently spread by the Kádár regime, Chou En-lai, who had also been to Budapest early in 1957, was supposed to have "proposed" the complete extermination of the rebellious intelligentsia. By having Imre Nagy executed in 1958, Kádár made still another move to ensure his position against just such a replacement, but, the fact is that by that time he already enjoyed the full-scale support of the Khrushchev leadership.

Thus entrenched the Kádár leadership felt it was time to launch its policy *vis à vis* the intellectuals, a politically highly dangerous group having a key role in Hungary in influencing public opinion. Aczél gradually became the lynchpin of that policy. As a Deputy Minister of Culture (1957–1967) and then as head of cultural policy within the top Party leadership (1967–1974), he was, however, no cultural policy-maker in either the broader or the narrower sense of the term. He was not concerned with creating institutions associated with his name, neither was he interested in science policy or in messianistic ideas about the education of people in their leisure time, let alone the budgetary problems of the financing of culture. Aczél was in charge of the "intelligentsia policy" of the Party. This meant the Party's handling of the major opinion-making intellectuals. For a long time it was an especially important and sensitive area, where a very real political struggle was going on even at a time when nothing could be seen on the surface. This was the only part of society where some kind of latent resistance was discernible. In 1957 the situation was one of open battle. The political authorities were facing a choice: they could either eliminate the rebellious influential intellectuals or try to come to a compromise with them. Since their backbone consisted of writers and poets, the issue boiled down to the future of Hungarian literature.

Practically every prominent writer was an active member of the political resistance. They were the finest and most widely read authors of their time: Tibor Déry, Gyula Illyés, Gyula Háy, László Németh, Péter Veres, István Örkény, Zoltán Zelk. Only a few completely non-political writers like Sándor Weöres, Géza Ottlik, János Pilinszky or Miklós Szentkuthy—were not involved. It was left to Aczél to decide whether to restore the continuity of Hungarian literature in exchange for a pledge on the part of the writers to refrain from political resistance or to "remove" the entire Hungarian literature and to "appoint" a bunch of rhymesters and fiction-manufacturing Party propagandists to replace them. In 1957, writers were "on strike". They boycotted the publications of the new regime. They refused to publish—if they were free at all, that is. Of those mentioned above, Déry, Háy and Zelk were in prison. Those who had been anywhere near the armed resistance were threatened by the gallows: the theatre manager Gábor Földes was executed because he had organized a protest rally against the action of borderguards who had opened fire on a crowd of civilians, and the rally had turned into a lynch mob. The playwright József Gáli, who had contacts with armed groups, was also sentenced to death, and was only pardoned because of a wave of interna-

tional protest. István Bibó, the most important Hungarian political thinker in the twentieth century and Minister without Portfolio in the Imre Nagy government, avoided being hanged for getting a protest memorandum to a foreign legation only because the legation concerned was that of India, and the Soviet Union could not afford to risk losing the goodwill of India at that time.

Still, the "silent" writers and poets could not even be persuaded to publish a politically completely neutral poem. What propelled Aczél toward the highest level of decision-making was that he took a bold initiative: he decided to re-integrate the rebellious writers into the official literary life of the regime at all costs. That solution was far from obvious. The "replacing" of rebellious or not completely trustworthy intellectuals by more compliant ones was not as mad and absurd an idea as it may sound. Suffice it to recall the elimination of the flourishing, internationally acknowledged Russian-Soviet avant-garde art of the 1920s or the attempts by the Hušak regime in the aftermath of 1968.

In 1957, the Hungarian regime, too, was ready for its own kind of "replacing". A group faithfully toeing the Party line had rallied in the "period of vacuum" around the anthology of poetry *Tűztánc* (Fire Dance); here insignificant party activist writers were making a determined effort to take over the place of the silent writers. Those in power, however, understood that if that line was taken, they could easily turn the majority of the intelligentsia in the broader sense of the term against them for a long time thereby putting consolidation at risk. Aczél was given the task of persuading the resisting writers to break their silence. It was this crucial task that raised him gradually to the rank of the leadership.

Beside the practical aspects of power politics, the decision to maintain the continuity of art, rather than to "appoint" a new art was fundamentally influenced by the differing relationship to art, especially to literature, of successive generations in the Communist leading élite. The first set who had seized power was made up of educated revolutionary intellectuals. This was the type of Lenin, Trotsky, Lunacharsky, Zinoviev and Bukharin or, in the Hungarian Communist movement, György Lukács and József Révai, the chief ideologue of the Rákosi period. The consolidation of power, on the other hand , was carried out by militants of worker or peasant origin, most of them self-taught, with little formal education. They too were aware of the part played by culture in undermining the credibility of the old ruling class and regarded art as a revolutionary force. Stalin belonged to that type. So did Rákosi in Hungary or, in the movement's third line, Aczél too. Their snobbery inclined them to relative mildness *vis à vis* literature in the period of the early terror, when the regime was settling in. There was no writer's trial during the Rákosi era between 1948 and 1953. For the next set of Communist leaders, coming into power after 1956, art was a "deviancy" like alcoholism. Who else but people with sick minds would use convoluted, artificial forms to relate things that could be spelt out "straight"? Khrushchev belonged to that type, as did Kádár in Hungary. Out of policy considerations, the latter consented to keeping the continuity of literature but yielded the area "intellectual policy", a field alien to him, to Aczél the snob, who, nevertheless, shared his political views on the issues of consolidation.

Aczél carried out his task in an exemplary manner. He made influential writers believe that the eventual release of their imprisoned fellow writers actually hinged

on their readiness to abandon their silence, so that they could have a ready justification for any opportunistic move they would make in the future. Aczél's snobbery was coupled with extensive reading and a certain sense of quality which helped him to form a fair judgement of the real merit of writers. In his subsequent activity, too, he regarded the really most valuable members of the writers' world as key men in influencing the opinions of others, so it was mainly them that he attempted to create good contacts with, and to rely on as far as was possible. Thus he mostly resisted the temptation of turning insignificant writers into influential ones.

Between 1960 and 1963, amnesty was granted to those who had taken part in the revolution. By granting it the regime did not place the justification for, or even the size of, the reprisals in doubt; it simply demonstrated that it had become consolidated to the point where such means were no longer necessary. It gave up forcing the people into a hypocritical imitation of identification with the regime, and from that time on, neutral passivity, the abandoning of acts of political opposition was regarded as a sufficient measure of political loyalty. This was formulated by Kádár in his famous slogan: "Who is not against us is with us". A potential of force capable of oppressing the whole of society if need be, was maintained, but after 1960 that force was never used for maximum oppression. The main tool for sustaining power became the political neutralization of society. In the terminology of political science, this meant a transition from a totalitarian form of modern dictatorship to its paternalistic form. This was what was called, in more popular terms, "soft dictatorship". The Kádár regime refrained from interfering with people's private life and even ensured that it remained undisturbed. No one was expected to sing in a choir, collect scrap metal or take part in mass sports after working hours.

With the completion of consolidation, the role of Aczél did not diminish; on the contrary, it grew. His policy of cultural management took on a doctrinal form that spelt out the essential principles of political neutralization for the intelligentsia, the "3 T's" (after the three Hungarian words *támogatás* [support], *tűrés* [toleration] and *tiltás* [prohibition]). The "3 T's" meant a relaxation of censorship, expressing a distinction between two types of permission: "support", which was enjoyed by politically "functional" works created in a spirit of identification with the regime, and "toleration". The latter meant that works for which the regime had no direct use, but which posed no threat either, were allowed to be published. Liberalism for cultural policy was complemented by a declaration of the "guiding principles for science and scholarship". This Party document declared "freedom in research and responsibility in publication". The cryptic slogan was meant to imply that politically sensitive things could be included in research reports for internal use but the same things could not be made public; it was up to the political control agency concerned to decide on their publication. In reality, Aczél personally decided which literary works and works of art could be regarded as politically neutral and which scientific works would be allowed to be disseminated in specialist circles, in a semi-public manner, without being permitted to be properly published.

It was only one of the requirements of being ranked in the category of the "second T" ("tolerated") that no political criticism of the regime, even in a veiled form, should appear in the work in question. For ensuring political neutrality it was equally important that a work of art should by no

means create any sense of "negative general mood," let alone malaise or debilitating decadence. Even the politically non-supporting part of society was expected to feel relatively comfortably among the given conditions, and that feeling of comfort would eventually culminate in a "general feeling of well-being". Using his self-taught knowledge, acquired largely in the 1930s, Aczél made genuine attempts to judge what kind of impact a piece of non-conformist fiction or poetry would have on its potential intellectual public in a given context. Would it strengthen their political neutrality or have the effect of driving them out of that position? He was moving on safe ground as long as he stayed in the world of "realist" literature written in a transparent idiom and portraying social situations relevant to political interpretation (social class differences, poverty, etc.), but the world of modern art was alien to him. There he vigilantly tried to size up how the "negative general mood" present in the so-called avant-garde works, the artistic representation of a *Weltgefühl* opposed to the feeling of comfort, or deliberately provocative, would affect the general social mood. He was inclined to ban such works on the ground that they were "alienated", and "their attitude to life was not positive".

Softening "Kádárism" was received with hostility by those Stalinists in the apparatus who had carried out the reprisals and had a major part in the initial consolidation after 1956. There were still a great many who would have liked to transform the system into a tougher dictatorship, for which the models were Czechoslovakia under Novotny and later Hušak or Ulbricht's and later Honecker's GDR. The main battleground was the "intellectual policy" now personified by György Aczél. The party bureaucrats' resistance "movement" made its attack over an issue which represented a genuine problem to Aczél himself and the Kádárist "intellectual policy". It had to be prevented that the dividing line between the two permissive "T's" should become blurred. The fact that works not grounded in the ideology of the regime were allowed to appear if they did not contain any articulated criticism, not even in the form of hints, and if their different mentality did not openly conflict with the power basis of the regime, did not mean that the "supported" works were not expected to express the ideological attitudes of the regime. The political advantage of the publication of tolerated writings lay in strengthening the sense of neutrality in the opinion-creating intellectuals, the segment of society most receptive to dissident ideas. The "supported" works expressing the ideology of the system had to be emphatic and carry sufficient weight. The appearance had to be avoided that anything that was allowed to be published automatically expressed the official view. Mind sets of a different kind, even if not threatening the foundations of the regime, could not be allowed to gradually replace the ideology of socialism. The official position could not be "pluralized". Thus in the 1960s and 70s the position and tasks of "Marxist criticism" became a central issue of literary life. The official view, in the development of which Aczél played a crucial role, was that the "tolerated" works should be subject to rigorous criticism in literary reviews, picking out those features of the "tolerated" work which were politically harmless but alien to the official ideology.

This meant that the practice of the "3 T's" applied to works of art only. In literary criticism there would be no room for anything else but "supported" views. Aczél made yet another concession by not excluding the publication of critical works taking a neutral position if they were re-

sponded to by "Marxist criticism". Tolerated but "not useful" ideas included "individualism", turning away from public life, as well as the "esoteric cult of forms", but also political ideas. First and foremost of these was nationalism, which could apply to anybody in whose view the number one national problem of Hungary was not its membership in the "camp of socialist countries led by the Soviet Union", but the position and problems of the Hungarian minorities living in the neighbouring countries, the threat of "national death" due to the declining birth rate or the issue of national pride. Aczél fought a running battle on "two fronts" for two decades: on the one hand, against attempts to smuggle oppositionism into "tolerated" works and, on the other, against the line, appearing in the guise of "Marxist criticism", which denied the right of the "tolerated" category to exist. The regime's policy *vis à vis* the intellectuals could never develop a clear position for the treatment of the problem that "Marxist criticism", being too liberal with regard to the "tolerated" views could bear political risks, whereas an eventual offensiveness on the side of "Marxist criticism" may endanger the "sense of well-being" of the authors of tolerated works, the very aim "toleration" was created for.

Révész gives a fascinating account of the tricks and manipulations by which Aczél tried to bring an intellectual élite, that had played a crucial part in the political preparation for the 1956 Revolution, closer to the regime, whose principle representative, as far as they were concerned, was he himself. The methods cunningly employed by Aczél are summed up by two terms: "policy of favours" and "informalizing". Aczél did not manipulate by relying on general rules equally valid for everyone but distributed favours tailored to individuals. In a broader sense, this practice applies to the entire technique through which the regime maintained power. Even during the Kádár regime, and since then, by the relationship between people and establishment which developed after the 1960–1963 amnesty launching a policy relying on neutralization as against plain oppression, has often been described by many as a compromise, and even likened to the historic compromise made in 1867 between Hungary and the Habsburg Empire. A compromise, however, is an agreement between active parties even if power relations between the parties are unequal and unilateral advatanges are offered for one of the parties. In the case of a favour, on the other hand, it is only the party handing out the favour which is an active party. A favour does not result in guaranteed conditions. It is something granted which the giver has the power to revoke. The more relaxed conditions of the Kádár era, as compared to the Rákosi regime, or the other socialist countries, were experienced by Hungarians as a package of favours, any of which could be withdrawn by a gust of wind from Moscow. In literary life, Aczél tried to charm the most esteemed figures and made it felt that the ground for the favour was the high literary merit of the person favoured which, however, he subtly hinted, was not enough in itself for winning the favour: a measure of loyalty must be made explicit.

Aczél did the granting through "informalization", i.e. personal contacts. He sought out the key intellectuals he thought worthy of being won over, rang them up, invited them for supper to his home with their spouses. This patriarchal, fraternizing procedure also signified that the commissar of the regime's policies regarding intellectuals would only try to win over people who were genuinely distinguished figures in the country's intellectual life, and had no intention to make key people out of

second-rate writers just because they were willing to become loyal servants. At the same time, he made it perfectly clear that he wanted to turn the key characters of literary life into a stabilizing factor. Aczél would only want to persuade his partners to take a position of neutrality, not to any spectacular commitment to the regime or to its unequivocal support. What he most of all wanted was to keep them separate from political opposition. His objective was that all kinds of opposition become isolated from the start by the authority and discreet loyalty of key people among the society of writers. In these friendly talks Aczél, as a witty and bright fellow-intellectual, a "colleague" as it were, made it felt that this was the only way for sustaining a climate for genuine literary values within the framework of the system. He did his best to make it fully clear that, within the Party leadership, all this depended largely on his own person, and if the key intellectuals concerned refused to act as his partners in the game, the policy urging political loyalty might gain the upperhand and become the only condition for the granting of favours. Such trifles as artistic qualities would no longer matter.

Aczél took great care that, on the one hand, in the practice of the handing out of favours, the granting of positions of privilege and the hierarchy created by the favours should not become divorced from the spontaneous, informal hierarchy among intellectuals based on genuine value, and, on the other, that the development of the hierarchy created by real privileges would be firmly under his control. By that method, the group of elite intellectuals, which had made up the leadership of the intellectual opposition after the fall of Imre Nagy's first government of 1953–1954 and had rallied the rank and file of Hungarian literary life behind the cause of the 1956 Revolution, was successfully integrated by Aczél into the regime's practice of political neutralization. Aczél could demonstrate to the higher powers that he was the man who had pacified this revolutionary leadership in the sense that he succeeded in having the influential intellectuals involved give up the rearguard action that it had fought in the autumn of 1956 and the winter of 1957, reconciling themselves to the fact that the Revolution had been ultimately defeated and that the new situation required a new attitude toward the powers-that-be.

It remains undecided whether the main issue in judging Aczél's activity should be his role in protecting the arts and preventing a policy in which creative intellectuals are granted privileges solely on the basis of the degree to which they are willing to be servants to the regime, or the fact that, by offering protection, he managed to break the continuity of political opposition. The new political opposition that later emerged had little of the direct, lively heritage of the 1956 Revolution to rely on.

This pacifying, neutralizing and integrating role of Aczél lasted until 1968. The new, self-confident generation of writers appearing on the scene in the wake of the Czechoslovak crisis wanted to establish its own organizations outside the politically controlled structures of literary life. Aczél had no recipe for handling this, nor were there routine procedures available. The aspiration aimed seemingly at expanding the internal, "professional" self-government in the arts was but a guise for political opposition from the start. The Young Writers' Attila József Circle (known by the acronym JAK), symbolizing by its very choice of name—the name of a modern classic poet who had comitted suicide at a young age—that major works could only be created on the grounds of "eternal opposition" against all kinds of organized power,

wanted to fight the same kind of rearguard action for the suppressed cause of '68 that the earlier generation of writers had fought for the Revolution of 1956. Their strategy was to create, by establishing an organization for young writers, a counter-forum opposed to the official, making the first move toward political pluralism by pluralizing an area thus far under bureaucratic control.

Aczél's methods failed when he tried to exercise them on this new generation of writers. They lacked the imprinted fear of their predecessors that the possibility of literary creativity was in danger, and a compromise must be made to save it. An informal, fraternizing personal relationship with Aczél was repugnant to them. They wanted objective, institutional contacts with the regime rather than informal, personal ones. They did not regard informality in this sense as a kind of intimacy "humanizing" the coldness of authority but as sheer humiliation, a charade in which they were required to smile while being at the mercy of the force of authority. The new generation of artists itself wanted to develop the hierarchy of reputations based on artistic merit, and did not wish it to be recognized by officialdom at the price of doing a service to the regime. They had no intention to legitimize power by socializing with Aczél at his dining table, thereby strengthening the stability of the régime. They wanted publication abroad or the acceptance of foreign scholarships to be recognized as rights, and not as favours granted to specific persons. In the 1970s, Aczél was no longer a successful pacifier.

At the turn of the 1970s and 1980s, as political opposition reappeared, the very method of political neutralization as the predominant method of maintaining the power of the Kádár regime became questionable. The movement of intellectuals, collecting signatures for various protests, maintaining samizdat periodicals and underground publishing houses and organizing "counter"-universities in private homes, started out as a civil rights movement in the mould of Charta 77 in Czechoslovakia or KOR in Poland. It soon grew into a general political opposition movement aiming at the assertion of civil liberties, the establishing of an economic model based on the principles of market economies and political pluralism. The aspirations of the Democratic Opposition advanced parallel with the movement of the young writers and the two became increasingly interwoven.

The nationalist trend in literature also grew livelier. The Kádár regime, one of whose most dangerous foes in 1956 had been the kind of nationalism which wanted to put an end to the country's dependence on the Soviet Union, did not develop an official nationalism of its own as some of the other countries of the Soviet Bloc did. Hungary's official ideology was a sterile and empty "internationalism", which avoided a noisy confrontation with the Hungarian national tradition but also failed rather spectacularly in its handling of it. The anti-Habsburg independence tradition, regarded as the "progressive" line during the Rákosi regime, and stylized into being a predecessor of the anti-fascism of the inter-war years, was useless since it provided an opportunity for pro-1956 undertones, whereas the Habsburg tradition was too "reactionary" for Communist agit. prop. The minimum objective of the nationalist opposition was to "normalize" the Kádár regime in this area and to achieve a greater emphasis on national identity, similarly to that in the Soviet Union or Romania. The maximum objective would have been to have the regime react by open foreign policy moves to the violations of the rights of the Hungarian minorities in the neighbouring countries.

In the conflict-ridden eighties the man in charge of "intellectual policy" had to decide what made it more likely that the neutrality of the wider sphere of intellectuals would be preserved: if the opposition were destroyed and the centres of rebellion eliminated, or if the centres were merely isolated because the traumatic impact of elimination could drive a wider circle of intellectuals out of the desired neutrality or would, at least, do grave damage to their all-important "political mood". The regime saw greater risks in the latter possibility, than in allowing innocuous opposition groups to exist, and therefore it did not bring itself to the point of taking police action to eliminate oppositionism. It was thought to be enough to isolate them and to make them insignificant. This went beyond "intellectual policies", still, Aczél continued to play a key role in the new situation too. Still, the tolerance shown with regard to the opposition was different from the tolerance of the 1960–1963 amnesty. At that time it had been the power of the establishment that was in evidence, the generosity stemming from a feeling of irreversible victory. The tolerance of the 1980s, on the other hand, was a forced concession. However weak that opposition was, its elimination by police power might have moved the broader intellectual classes out of their position of neutrality. This risk was increasingly sensed by wider and wider circles of people. Neutralization had originally been meant as an *ersatz* and temporary solution but the substitute had turned out to be better than what they had wanted to use it as a substitute for. Tolerating a successfully isolated opposition was out of the question. In this case the regime regarded as its objective the withering away of opposition as soon as possible. The strategic objective of the opposition, on the other hand, was to legalize itself, making thereby the first move toward the pluralization of the system. Aczél, for his part, insisted that the pressure of the opposition hindered Kádárism from progressing toward less and less repressive forms. He continued to see "Kádárism" threatened by those forces in the party apparatus, who, as they had done after the amnesty, did not cease to aspire to "normalize" the Kádár regime, which they thought too lenient toward "petty bourgeois attitudes", into a harder dictatorship on the Hušak–Honecker model.

By the 1980s, Aczél reached the position where he realized that "Kádárism" could only be made resistant to the "normalizing" pressure if it became less repressive. Neutralization was no longer sufficient. Aczél in effect tried to apply a somewhat inarticulate theoretical construction of Marxist-Leninist theory concerning the "withering away" of the state to the concrete situation. According to its doctrines, following the solidification of the "dictatorship of the proletariat", a transitional form on the way toward "stateless" communism, the "repressive" function of the dictatorship of the proletariat would become secondary and lose its edge as opposed to its "economic organizing" and "cultural educating" role. The autonomy of the various apparatuses performing specific functions would increase, while the top power centre, which earlier had held them in thrall, would become transformed into a "dispatching" service. Révész reveals by means of subtle analyses how the "intellectual politician" saw reform in asserting the supposed immanence of the system, and anti-reformism in the opposition aspiring to transcendentalize the system. Aczél's contorted ideas, estranged from real life, were no longer suitable for the pacification of rebellious intellectuals, and their isolation was less and less successful.

In the 1980s the Soviet-type system was in a crisis in the entire bloc. The extremely high rate of accumulation maintained for eighty years with barely any increase in productivity exhausted even the resources of the Soviet Union, thought to be bottomless. In the case of Hungary, poor in energy and highly indebted, (huge foreign loans were used to encourage consumerism—another method of neutralization and pacification) an especially grave crisis was developing. The 1985 Party Congress was faced with the seemingly insignificant task of re-formulating the evaluation of the 1956 Revolution for its 30th anniversary the following year. The implication, however, was no less than the fact that Kádár's position had become problematic, since the General Secretary was the very embodiment of the crushing and the condemnation of the Revolution. In the course of the crisis the "intellectual policy" ultimately lost its function. Aczél fell also formally and he was replaced. His last attempt was to organize, by the establishing of the New March Front, an intellectual élite which might lead a flexibly executed changeover meant to salvage the system. The re-evaluation of the Revolution involved a re-thinking of the assessment of the execution of Imre Nagy, as well as facing what had happened during the period of reprisals lasting until the amnesty. The hard-liners, who also became more active during the crisis and rallied mainly around János Berecz, the new ideological chief replacing Aczél, wanted to abandon "Kádárism" and return to the period of reprisals as the "pure well" from which the regime, turned into "a lukewarm pool" by Kádárism, could be revitalized. Regarding Aczél's position, one can only make assumptions. For the sake of saving Kádárism, he would probably have allowed a re-evaluation of the period of reprisals as a forced prolongation of Stalinism. Such an assessment would have entailed the rehabilitation of Imre Nagy or at least the admission that his execution had been unjustified. The decision rested with Kádár who chose to step away from his life work, "Kádárism", rather than be declared responsible for the death of Imre Nagy.

The fall of Aczél was followed in 1988 by the voluntary surrender of the regime. The changeover of 1988–1989 was a surreal story, neither the first nor the last in Hungarian history. Those in power were fully aware of the situation of the country, and of the fact that economic collapse was imminent. The regime did not have the courage to wait for and assume the role of "trustee" in the bankruptcy. It chose instead to yield power to a weak and isolated opposition, which would never have had the strength to force this power change.

It is to posterity to form a general judgement of the Kádár years, for which an assessment of Aczél's policy may well provide a yardstick. The main question is whether we see mainly the "value saver" or the "pacifier" in him. In Hungary, there was only political samizdat. As a general rule, works of literature were not pushed into illegal publication, though some major authors—György Konrád, Péter Nádas, István Eörsi, to name but a few—were harrassed by constant suggestions for cuts and changes with publication put off indefinitely. In the climate of the "three T's", the traditional and prestigious role of Hungarian literature as "counter-publicity", the "conscience of the nation" and a "substitute for a real parliament", disappeared. The possibility of legal publication built into Hungarian authors an extremely demoralizing self-censorship, limiting not only the political message but in all likelihood artistic value as well.

It is hard now to assess how a successful effort to make oppression comfortable

for the majority of the oppressed is to be judged. This was done in a period when there could be no real hope for changing the regime, and in such a situation stubborn mental resistance may prove either impossible or downright debilitating from a psychological point of view as well. For the "inheritors of the fallen regime" (to use Cardinal Mindszenty's words of November 3, 1956), who tend to consider themselves former "reform-Communists" today, the Kádár regime is a historical antecedent of the changeover of 1989–1990, whose main strands paved the way to future democratization. The emotionally overcharged type of anti-communism, however, does not differentiate between "Stalinism" and "Kádárism", the "hard" dictatorship before 1953 and the "soft" one after 1963. The great merit of Révész's book is that it sketches out a third possible evaluation, according to which "Kádárism" was but the "specific Hungarian form" of the "stagnation" of the Brezhnev era. The author of this fine book, while subtly describing the two possibilities of interpretation, is more inclined to appreciate Aczél, the saver of values, while the author of this review tends to see Aczél's policy more as a peculiarly Hungarian, system-specific form of policy *vis à vis* artists and intellectuals conforming to the "stagnation" of the Brezhnev years.

The special interest of Aczél's character probably lies in the fact that he used a great inventiveness to achieve a purpose for which mere routine would have been quite sufficient. He may have been mediocre but he was a "phenomenon", a figure not interchangeable with just any other bureaucrat. He played a barren and ominous role with considerable sophistication. ❧

Miklós Györffy

A New Family Saga

Pál Závada: *Jadviga párnája* (Jadviga's Pillow), Magvető, 1977, 444 pp. • Agáta Gordon: *Kecskerúzs* (Goat Rouge), Magvető, 1977, 190 pp. • László Csiki: *A pusztulás gyönyöre* (The Joys of Destruction), Jelenkor, 1997, 247 pp.

Among the initiated, the favoured outsider of this year's Book Week was to be *Jadviga's Pillow,* a novel by the almost unknown Pál Závada. Since literature, least of all fiction, attracts scarcely any publicity in Hungary nowadays, the success of a novel depends more than a little on word of mouth. Those in the know had recommended this book by Závada, a previously little-known 45-year-old writer, as a splendid novel. The blurb claims that "*Jadviga's Pillow* is a significant work, a fascinating story, whose linguistic power is a clear gesture towards the ideals of classical prose in the uncertain hierarchy of contemporary literature." Since no really significant Hungarian novel has come up recently, it was with keen expectations that I set to reading the book. Its handsome presentation, with its pages of handmade paper stitched and not glued, is eye-catching. Nor was I let down, for *Jadviga's Pillow* is indeed a fine book, and as is usually the case with truly significant works, it does not fit into any scheme.

The book is in the form of a journal, as the subtitle tells us. The diarist is András Osztatni, a well-to-do peasant farmer, and he takes us from the day before his nuptials in February 1915 until 1922, when his marriage finally breaks down and all his hopes regarding life and love come to naught. The diary is certainly fictional, albeit at the end names are mentioned of actual people who have been quoted. (That the novel has some kind of documentary basis is made probable by the fact that Závada began as a descriptive sociologist and his first book, *Kulákprés* (Kulak Squeezer, 1986) is about communist terror in the villages in the early 1950s.

András Osztatni's journal is not a historical document but a private, personal account. The main subject is the diarist's marriage. Although it was a love match, for a long time his wife is unwilling to consummate the marriage. Eventually she succumbs to her husband's persistent, sometimes even aggressive wooing, indeed she achieves an orgasm with him on occasion, and bears a child to him. But crises of estrangement keep recurring, always due to Jadviga's capricious rejections.

But the truth will out and becomes eventually known to the husband as well. She has a lover, from way back before their marriage—a friend of her husband's youth, the half-German half-Jewish country town lawyer, Franci Winkler. But András Osztatni loves Jadviga so much that he is unable to

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is our regular reviewer of new fiction.

give her up. At the price of much torment he shares her. Jadviga does not want a divorce, indeed she keeps rousing his passion, making him hope that his understanding and love will bring its reward. Finally it is he who has had enough. When Jadviga gives birth to her second son, not by him, although he acknowledges him as his child, he turns his back for good on the family home and banishes himself to a solitary, desolate homestead.

This summary might suggest some kind of a conventional *ménage à trois,* but that is not the case. Not only because the novel is set in a more or less peasant environment that is rather different to the middle-class eternal triangle and its frivolity, but because Závada makes no use at all of the rewarding though hackneyed possibilities of adultery as a plot element. On the contrary, identifying himself with his diarist, he shyly and embarrassedly avoids an anecdotal specification of the "scenes" of disclosure. This, however, does not mean that he would shyly and embarrassedly avoid all the depth of emotion or instinct that accompany this story of a matrimonial triangle—or, rather, of love.

Jadviga's Pillow is not about a marriage, nor is it about morality. It is about love, and, about what for Závada means practically the same, loneliness. Jadviga has loved two, indeed three men, but only the pillow she inherited from her mother can she embrace in devotion and sense of security. Her own solitude began with losing her parents as a little girl. As an orphan she fell in love with her guardian and with her girl-friend. Her guardian was none other than György Osztatni, the father of her husband to be; he in turn had been in love with Jadviga's mother, Mária Ponyiczky, before they both married someone else. György Osztatni, an enterprising peasant with a mysterious and adventurous life behind him, treated Jadviga, the daughter of his first love, as his own. Indeed, the novel even seems to hint that Jadviga was really his own daughter and this is why he left half of his property to her. Jadviga loved the man in him and, after his early death, she sought emotional support first in the aggressive wooing of the young articled clerk and then in the arduous love of the son, who reminded her of his father. Throughout her life she nourishes an intimate relationship with her friend, Irmus. Yet amid all these love-lorn, passion-seeking but fragmentary, one-sided relationships Jadviga again and again wishes to be alone, she grapples with a tortured sense of lack. She is motivated by a fatal ambivalence which probably can only be explained by human nature, which is capricious, mostly isolating, and cannot handle the emotional claims of someone else.

The temptation to solitariness and privacy also lurks in her husband, András, from the start—he is always seeking to withdraw in his humiliation and disappointments in love. He is prompted to do so by grief, or by sulkiness or by empty self-sacrifice. Sure in his sincere monogamous devotion and in the prevailing moral code, András feels he is right regarding Jadviga; though he forgives her for all she had done, he does not understand her. Not because he is callous or selfish, but because it is impossible for him to understand her. Someone in love cannot understand one who does not return love in the manner he desires.

Being for the most part András Osztatni's intimate journal, *Jadviga's Pillow* mainly portrays his point of view and so it is perhaps a more authentic, more profound depiction of his truth, his inner justice than of Jadviga's. Nonetheless, the novel provides a place for the woman's inner life and truth as well. Závada finds a fine formal solution here: after András's death, in the 1930s, Jadviga discovers her

husband's secret journal and, conversing with him as it were, she "inserts" her supplementary comments, the other side of their story. Her "inserts" interrupt the journal at six points, bringing the reader into the story of the couple and of their environment. The information offered on the events and the emotional tuning and the stylistic presentation of those events are the means to this. The outlines of a large-scale family chronicle unfold against the background of a tragic mental collapse.

But it is not only Jadviga who adds to her husband's journal: so does Misu, the second, bastard son, who has always felt himself at a disadvantage compared to his elder brother, the handsomer, more talented and, for a long time, more fortunate Marci. Misu discovers the journal and his mother's additions when still in his teens, and learns from it that the man he thought of as his father is not really that. For long years he struggles with this paternal legacy in his solitary life and he adds his own comments to it. His italicized footnotes, growing in number and frequency, perhaps form the most striking, linguistically most suggestive, layer of the novel.

Just like the author of *Jadviga's Pillow,* the Osztatni family are Slovaks, members the Slovak enclave in Békés County in the south-eastern corner of Hungary, near the Romanian border. The journal is full of Slovak words and idioms. Misu's notes at first give translations for these or add recollections and social comments. But slowy the notes start to reveal his personality and his own story. While his "father" and mother, despite being Slovaks and using Slovak phrases, basically express themselves in a refined, elaborate literary Hungarian in the journal, Misu uses the corrupt, colourless Hungarian of the uprooted mixed population of our day. It is this manner of expression that tells us most about his own life. The somewhat thick-headed Misu actually turns informer under pressure during the Rákosi dictatorship, and then becomes an eccentric, lonely bachelor, an unhappy survivor of what had been a prosperous peasant way of life—just as the former peasant way of life and culture of Hungary fall victim to socialist ideology. There may be great differences between the way András and Jadviga express themselves, but both are accurate reflections of the emotional and ideological horizon of the cultivated, literate peasant farmers of market-towns. Misu's inarticulate reduction of language documents the proletarianization of a rich peasant culture in a heart-rending way.

One of the most interesting cinema works of recent years has been Péter Forgách's series, *Private Hungary,* which made use of amateur family films that have survived from the 1930s and '40s. Závada's novel has a similar feel: as if it were presenting private documents of real private lives, which conjure up public history in the way it is lived through by the private individual, that is as the mostly unpleasant but basically secondary by-product of the constant human problems of a non-recurring life. Although András Osztatni is writing his journal in the stormy world of the 1910s, whether his wife returns his love and what the prospective harvest is going to bring are more important to him than war, revolution and retribution. *Jadviga's Pillow* creates this captivatingly authentic semblance of private documents and this is the paramount attraction of the novel and, at the same time, a new victory for the classical novelist's attitude.

Another novelty at this year's Book Week was Agáta Gordon's slim volume, *Goat Rouge,* a first work by an author even less known than Závada. Nothing is well known about her, allegedly even the publishers only know a Post Office Box address, al-

though recently an anonymous radio interview revealed that the woman's name concealed a man. *Goat Rouge* is about lesbian women, which one might think is the reason for the concealment. But a reading of the book convinces one that something else is at issue, since from the point of view of moral conventions the events, situations and relationships presented are absolutely innocent. They provide no cause for scandal at all, even by moral standards stricter than the casual promiscuity of today.

Goat Rouge is a cycle of lyrical pictures of emotions, desires, moods, memories and landscapes. The forty short chapters are so many lyrical runs produced in the heroine's interior monologue without interpunctuation. The chapters are divided by lines of poetry set on separate pages and in a different typeface. According to the fiction, they are not poems by the heroine but come from a slim book of poetry which she has happened upon in the waiting room of a woman psychiatrist. Since the volume has no dust jacket she does not know whose poems they are but she feels as if they were intended for her, matching her mental problems. The reader is faced by a kind of game which he has become unused to: a literary mimicry of the romantic and rococo.

The plot is fairly simple: the protagonist, a young girl, Leona, notices in her adolescence that she feels attracted to her female rather than male companion and from then on her course of life is determined by her homoeroticism. Ignoring chronology, her lyrical stylized reports and recollections of her emotional vicissitudes follow one another in the first person singular, in a loose, associative series. Apart from memories of childhood summers in the country, providing a kind of Proustian intonation, these are commonplace love affairs, mostly taking place in her student hostel and consistently without physical relations. Soon there appears Isolda, the great love with whom Leona eventually retreats into a small lodge in the woods. They share their Rousseauesque idyll with a similar couple, Gerle and Paloma, who live in a nearby village, practically forming together a four-sided, single-sex commune. Anyway, the novel continues to avoid open eroticism. Isolda finally deceives Leona with Paloma, and Leona is left alone in the forest hide-away. With the assistance of her friends she obtains treatment from Doctor Orsolya Hostell, who herself is heterosexual but whose interesting and attractive character can capture also the interest of a lesbian woman.

The hospital treatment provides the framework for the story, the monologue starts out with it and also returns to it at the end. As the inserted poems and the unpunctuated text indicated, it is intended to be ironically and impressionistically playful, and as the girls' names (which include Rahel, Emese, Sarolta, etc.) also indicate, the novel aims for a slightly elevated, aetherial region. Alongside the Proust reminiscences, the distant influences of Alain-Fournier, Péter Nádas and others can be sensed. But Agáta Gordon is lighter, more playful and indeed more unsubstantial and superficial than her models. The heroine and her emotional adventures are not interesting enough, the stylization sometimes becomes flat and the reiterated verbal variations, which slowly become monotonous, offer nothing new beyond a certain point.

In his latest book, László Csiki provides four fairly long stories under the title, *The Joys of Destruction.* The 53-year-old author comes from Transylvania, where he had lived and published for a long time, and his lyrically objectivist writings continue to be set in a Transylvanian or Romanian milieu. This is true of the sto-

ries in this latest volume. The protagonist of *Chinese Defence* arrives home in Transylvania from Soviet captivity in 1962. He has come from a region in the Far East which at the time of Soviet-Chinese tension came under Chinese rule, together with the prisoners of war forgotten and languishing there. China now sends home these ragged, starving, emaciated men to use them as evidence of the inhumanity of the Soviet authorities. This is how György Péteri arrives home with a grizzled beard down to his waist and an Usbek wrap resembling a caftan, causing no small problems to the Romanian administration, as his reappearance could damage morale in a country in the process of constructing socialism. "People are longing for quiet, they are living their lives, with difficulties of course but it is precisely in the interest of saving their peace and eagerness that they should not be upset." György Péteri does not understand much of all this, as for him all that exists is his one and only life, which has been stolen from him. Yet this is precisely what the interior ministry and party agencies have no appreciation of. They are only willing to receive the uncalled-for newcomer once he has a new appearance, a new name and a new identity.

The Wanton Rabbit, a "socialist and realistic story", mirrors the pliant mind of a Hungarian teacher of biology at Cluj (Kolozsvár). This young man who, with many others, does not feel happy in Ceausescu's dreary police state, has presumably incurred suspicion by his on and off friendship with a vagrant and drunken "civil-rights and educational activist". Later on it turns out that the repeated disappearances of this friend of his are part of the process of transsettling to Hungary itself, and leading to the suspicion that perhaps he was a police informer with the duty of having others apprehended. During one of his visits he has entrusted a rabbit to the care of the teacher-protagonist, and it seems as if it were the animal that has brought him finally into deep trouble. He is being dismissed from his job, alienated from his lover, and all his movements are being watched. A special agent is relentlessly pressuring him into providing information on the opposition. In his inert and inane loneliness, the terrified young man makes his bitter and vehement observations to his rabbit and it is through this that he becomes really worthy of surveillance. His sole subversive activity consists of this monologue, which provides the text of the story, and his sole witness and accomplice is the rabbit.

The grotesque and ironic monologue tries to capture a state of existence in which nothing can be known for certain, not even whether one is really being observed or whether they only want to achieve a semblance of it. "I was not ashamed of my fear, I even became accustomed to it like a crippled railwayman is to his wooden leg. It was an incurable state lasting all one's life, there was nowhere to step out of it, it could only be anaesthetized at times—with love and alcohol, but nowadays even these two were not present in my larder." Csiki's protagonist, whose models the author must have personally encountered in large numbers, lives with his rabbit, with his impossible, humiliating and stupid defencelessness, in a way in which he both suffers and feels at home.

While the presentation of the first story is marked by a dry, impassive objectivity coloured by lyrical pictures, *The Wanton Rabbit* is dominated by a metaphoric and ironic self-reflexion. Of a further different tone is the title story, *The Joys of Destruction,* in which a lyrical objectification (the feature most typical of Csiki, appearing here mainly in his description of nature) is blended with elements of science fiction

and a negative utopia. It is set in a closed zone where game-keepers are entrusted with the task to wipe out every living creature. A nuclear catastrophe must have taken place somewhere in the vicinity (a clear reference to Chernobyl), people have already been evacuated from the region and now it is time to destroy the animals so that no possible carrier of contamination should survive. Meanwhile, one former inhabitant returns home into his evacuated village, after his internment in a faraway place before the catastrophe. His arrival causes utter confusion among the game-keepers and their helpers, the prisoners compelled to retrieve and burn the dead animals. The mere fact that the man could have entered the supposedly tightly guarded zone gives rise to various alarming presumptions. Just like *The Wanton Rabbit, The Joys of Destruction* also opens up the threatening perspectives of irrational uncertainty. It is even possible that no nuclear catastrophe has taken place at all, that even the gamekeepers, considering themselves to be powerful and indomitable, are only tools of some anonymous higher will.

Csiki's work here reminds one of the literature expressing the prevailing climate and the parabolic methods of the 1970s and 1980s, whose limits were already evident at the time. He writes in an extremely intensive, concentrated manner, his prose is masculinely lean and metaphorically dense, his images evocative and illuminating. All in all, he calls up a great verbal and poetic apparatus for the narration of his parabolic stories, but one has a déja vu feeling of having read and seen all this before. And one often feels fatigued by the overstrained demonstration of a literary arsenal. While Závada's novel proves that the classical manner of narration has still huge reserves, Agáta Gordon and László Csiki's prose show that it is not enough to rely simply on the real or presumed poetic power of style, words and images. ❧

Nicholas T. Parsons

Central Europe Again! (Or Never)

Lonnie R. Johnson: *Central Europe: Enemies, Neighbors, Friends.* Oxford University Press, 1996, 340 pp, with black and white illustrations, maps and charts.

".... era il nostro vizio, questo: d`andare avanti con la testa sempre voltata all`indietro."
Micol in Il Giardino dei Finzi Contini by Giorgio Bassani

In 1979 (so I read in my guidebook to Prague) the official organ of the Czech Communist Party, *Rudé Právo,* delivered itself of one of its more strikingly inelegant aphorisms, namely: *"Those who lie on the rails of history must expect to have their legs chopped off".* The brutality of this image, with its mixture of bullying power assertion and childish venom, can also be seen as the Communists' *reductio ad absurdum* and grotesque trivialization of something buried deep in the Central European self-perception and of the extraordinary degree of human suffering inflicted last but not least by the Communists themselves; for Central Europe as a region is characterized above all by a recurrent sense of irreparable loss, whether expressed as the collective loss of population, of territory and of statehood; or the same phenomenon in microcosm, a multitude of individual losses of property, of freedom, of life itself. The struggle to regain the past (both in a physical and a psychological sense) has inevitably led to the clash of competing claims and to the habit of legitimising present attitudes or policies with reference to the unfinished business of Central European history. Like it or not, this sense of unfinished business is one of the factors that gives the area its distinctive cultural profile; its ramifications reach deep into the psyche of Central Europeans with implications for individual and national identity, for economic and political development, as also for Central European attitudes to the rest of the world. Moreover, the unfinished business divides populations internally as it does states from their neighbours, often despite the best efforts of politicians and diplomats (but sometimes precisely because of their worst efforts). It lurks behind the type of double standard which Arthur Koestler applied to many Germans of the Hitler generation, for whom he coined the memorable expression "mimophant". The mimophant, says Koestler, is a phenomenon most of us have met in life: "a hybrid who combines the delicate frailness of the mimosa, crumbling at a touch when his own feelings are hurt, with the thick-skinned robustness of the elephant trampling over the feelings of others. [...] ... The majority of Germans who supported the Führer belonged to a species of mimophants. They were capable of shedding genuine tears at the death of their pet

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canaries; what they did at other times is perhaps better forgotten."[1]

Where wars start and never seem to end...

It is hardly surprising that the descriptive metaphors for Central European historical events so often allude to violence: in the historical literature on the region, references abound to the "rape" of Poland, to the "crushing" of Hungarian freedom and now, most chillingly, to the "holocaust". Lonnie Johnson himself, in his otherwise measured and scrupulously unemotional narrative, speaks of "breaking Bohemia's back" and of the Bohemian nation being "decapitated" after the Battle of the White Mountain in 1620. It seems as if this is a part of the world where the slaughter and casual violence that occur in the history of any nation are never lost in the mists of time, but suppurate like an open sore, the wound of Amfortas that never heals. Kosovo is beyond the periphery of Central Europe as historians have defined it, but Kosovo's significance as the defining event in Serbian history, an ancient wrong which must sooner or later be addressed, has often been replicated in different guise amongst the nations of Central Europe. Thus, what is heroism and selfless patriotism to one nation may seem like know-nothing nationalism to its neighbour, and the self-righteous whine of a victim culture is the obverse of the same culture's aggressive tendencies. "Justice", as Norman Douglas dispiritingly observed, "is not good enough for some and too good for others."

It is one of the many strengths of Johnson's book that he strikes an ever-insightful balance between the history of the Central European psyche (collectively and individually viewed) and the geopolitical circumstances of which that psyche is an expression. We are reminded constantly not only of the reality of loss, but of how people have internalized it — a salutary experience for readers who have grown up in a country that has not been invaded since 1066 or, in the case of the United States of America, as constituted, has never been successfully invaded at all. Compare and contrast the historical complacency of the Anglo-Saxons with the outlook of a Lithuanian, whose country in 1400 encompassed a territory that was 100,000 square miles *larger* than modern France. (It now occupies an area of just 25,000 square miles). As for population, the Hungarians lost 60 per cent of theirs in the Tatar invasions of 1241–2; moreover, between 1500 and 1700 (which includes the period of partition and Turkish occupation), the Hungarian population is estimated to have dropped from 4 million to 3.5 million while in Europe as a whole it increased from 80 to 130 millions.[2] The subsequent development whereby Magyars were to become an ethnic minority in their own historic territories was one of the determining factors of Hungarian 19th-century politics, mostly with unfortunate results.

Yet if the Hungarian experience looks grim, Johnson's figures for Bohemia are a powerful reminder of the shared fate of Central Europeans: between the Battle of the White Mountain (he writes) and the end of the Thirty Years War in 1648, emigration and population decline in the Czech lands amounted to 70 per cent of the former Czech nation (p. 95). It is no wonder that Czech historians called this period of Bohemia's history the *doba temna,* or "time of darkness", even if the flowering Baroque culture that changed the face of Prague thereafter has given us a different perspective on it. Leaving aside all questions of justice and injustice in the past, the sheer magnitude of the changes inflicted on individuals, sometimes with brutal rapidity, has deeply marked the

peoples of this region, although it has also taught them vital survival skills. Moreover the rationalizing tendency of our own age to justify social and economic upheaval (even certain aspects of Nazism and Stalinism) in the name of "progress" (= modernization) loses its appeal in the face of developments that turned the clock back ("second serfdom") or removed a country from the map (the partition of Poland). Generation after generation has had to accommodate such unwelcome new realities: in Elias Canetti's second volume of autobiography there is a poignant evocation of the sheer bewilderment and disorientation (but also a dogged determination to survive) that the ordinary person might feel when faced with historical earthquakes that dismantle entire socio-economic systems; Canetti`s cleaning lady in the Vienna of the 1920`s had a vivid memory of her youth, when she once served a welcoming drink to the Russian Czar, the German Emperor and Franz Joseph on their arrival at the Lainzer Park; but now she inhabited a world utterly changed, though mentally she had never really left the world it replaced: "She could see all three of them, as though they were still standing there; she described their panaches, their uniforms, their faces; she still knew what types of horses they had been riding and what words they had used when thanking her for the beverage. She didn't sound servile, more as if everything was still present; and while her arms reached up to show me how she had offered the welcoming beverage to each of the emperors, she appeared a bit surprised that no one was taking the cup from her hands. Everything was gone. Where were the emperors? How was it possible nothing was left? And while she never put these thoughts into words and never betrayed any regret, I sensed that it was no less enigmatic for her than for me, and that it was because of this enigma that she told me about the past so powerfully and graphically."[3]

The ball and chain of the past

Raimund Löw, the highly professional foreign correspondent of the ORF, recently summed up his impressions for viewers at the end of a five-year stint covering the United States for Austrian television and radio. "America", he said, "is a land that concerns itself not at all with the past and not too much with the present, but very actively with the future. That is what gives this country such an extraordinary dynamic power". Leaving aside whether this quasi-aphorism is actually true, what is significant is that Central European intellectuals like Löw are inclined to view America in this light. The unspoken comparison is with their own countries that lack the American dynamism because they are immured in their past, nursing ancient grievances, learning little, remembering everything. Johnson himself (a married-in Central European) has written a book entitled *Vienna: The Past in the Present,* but to his credit, his depiction of Central Europe's claimed backwardness in relation to the west is by no means so one-dimensional as the view I have caricatured above. With commendable lucidity he beats the boundaries of traditional debate about the failure of Central Europe to match both the speed and the quality of economic, social and political development in the western half of Europe. Failure, (which is always *relative* failure) in each of these fields may be explained in historical or geopolitical terms, although scholars naturally disagree on the degree of emphasis to be placed on individual factors. Johnson is scrupulous in reporting alternative views with notable lack of bias and qualifies the

generalizations he does offer, without ever losing sight of structural continuities. Was the late survival of feudalism (in some cases the introduction of a second feudalism) a main cause of sluggish economic performance? Does the lagging development of an autonomous middle class satisfactorily account for delayed modernization and the slow achievement of a civil society? To what extent have purely geographical factors (the insecurity of plain dwellers, the controlling influence of rivers, the mountain barriers) determined the course of history in the area? Each of these questions raises supplementary ones, but simply posing such questions helps us to think about a complicated history in a productive way.

Antemurale christianitatis
Self-sacrifice and the "desire for recognition"

The often paradoxical leitmotifs of Central European self-perception would be the central feature of a cultural history of the whole region, were one to be written.[4] Johnson highlights the notion, common to Hungarians and Poles in particular, that their historical role was to be the "bulwarks of Christianity" (although the interpretation of what this meant naturally varied according to the enemy being confronted). The failure of the West adequately to appreciate the degree of self-sacrifice that these and other nations endured for the Christian world, or even the sense that they had often been betrayed by the rest of Chistendom, led to a remarkable local identification with the sacrifice of Christ himself. One could add to Johnson's historical analysis some cultural examples that supply a further perspective on this enduring theme: Mickiewicz's poem *Dziady* (Forefathers' Eve –1832) compared Poland to Christ suffering for the other nations; in Petőfi's *"Sors, nyiss nekem tért..."* ("Fate, Give Me Space...") the poet himself, filled with a sense of his patriotic duty, aspires to a Christ-like role that will win him a "new cross and crown of thorns" when he dies "for all men's good":[5]

> *Tell me, tell me, fate, such holy death*
> *awaits me ... and I'll make*
> *with my own hands the cross on which I'm laid*
> *crucified to break.*

Remarkably enough, even Germans could see Poland in a quasi-mystical light, as suffering in their rebellions for the oppressed everywhere. This attitude could find romantic expression, for instance in Harro Harring's *Der Freiheit Heiland* (Freedom's Salvation), where Poland assumes the role of John the Baptist preparing the nation for its sacrificial role.[6] In painting, historical figures abound which iconographically recall the *pietà*, the locus classicus being supplied by Bertalan Székely's treatment of *The Finding of Louis II after Mohács*. An heraldic example given by Johnson is the Polish eagle mounted on a black cross that became current after the 1863 uprising in the Russian-controlled part of Poland. In the Czech context, Masaryk and others have made play with the more general notion of the "Czech martyr complex", based on the idea that the most glorious period of Czech history had begun and ended with martyrdom (that of St Wenceslas and of John Hus). The Jesuits were cunning enough to tap into this vein of Czech feeling with a counter-martyr in the shape of St John Nepomuk, whose martyrology directed attention away from "national" preoccupations and back towards the politically safer notion of sacrifice for the faith.[7]

Of course the Romantic and Historicist examples cited above post-date the national revivals that were to be transmuted into political nationalism. One of the no-

table strengths of the book under review is its demonstration of the manner in which the past of Central European nations was reinvented to suit a nationalist perspective. The medieval *"natio"*, where "the nation" was defined by the nobility and its interests (the nobility itself often being of diverse ethnic origin) gave way to a racially determined perception of the heroic "one nation", which was then projected onto the past. Religion gets drawn into this process, the Hussites being seen by some as proto-nationalists, as they were proto-Socialists for the purposes of Communist propaganda. In Hungary, the Calvinists are strongly (but not exclusively) associated with the national cause as freedom fighters in Transylvania, the latter region being the repository of authentic *Ungartum* during the period of partition by the Turks and Habsburgs; subsequently they were a source of manpower for the *kuruc* armies. Calvinism being a creed that in principle subjected the state to the church, there was no inherent contradiction between Calvinist piety and secular Magyar rebelliousness. By contrast with this picture of Protestantism as the underdog, fighting against the central power for national and religious autonomy, Johnson offers an especially illuminating discussion on the role of Lutheranism in German nationalism (sometimes crudely described as the "Luther to Hitler theory"). The Lutheran insistence on the personal nature of religious experience, its "inwardness", was the obverse of an outward subservience to the state, whose potential consequences we all know.

Herder and progress—Forward to the past

The ghost of Herder (or at least his notion of the *Volksgeist*) flits through these pages like an ambivalently programmed harbinger of liberation. The enthusiasm with which his ideas were embraced (not to say misinterpreted and misused) is an indication of the shallow roots struck by the Enlightenment in Central Europe (one remembers Joseph II withdrawing virtually all his measures on his deathbed). Johnson aptly quotes Sir Isaiah Berlin: "All regionalists, all defenders of the local against the universal, all champions of deeply rooted forms of life, both reactionary and progressive, both genuine humanists and obscurantist opponents of scientific progress, owe something, whether they know it or not, to the doctrines which Herder introduced into European thought"[8].

Herder's writings, therefore, supply ammunition for both nationalists and liberal internationalists. His insistence that nations learned from each other in fruitful intercourse could underpin the recurrent and idealistic project of a Danubian Confederation that Kossuth and others have envisaged. Unfortunately, for this to be credible as a project, its proponents really needed to assume a "Central European identity". One assumes that such an identity would look partly like that of an American, and partly like that of an EU citizen, where a sense of common European heritage is combined with a (qualified?) allegiance to the individual nation state. In an interesting article on Central European writers, Csaba G. Kiss cites the case of Stanislaw Vincenz (1888–1971), whom he describes as a "son of the Carpathians" and who might be one of those rare people with such an identity, "knowing at first hand the coexistence of peoples and nationalities in Eastern Galicia ... a complex conglomerate of Poles, Ukrainians, Jews and Rumanians". In 1942 Vincenz lamented the missed opportunities for making common cause among Central Europeans in words that could appear appropriately in any requiem for the area: "If the Central European region does not unite its forces

into some kind of intellectual and cultural alliance, each one of its parts will, of necessity, become the dependency of a greater unit."[9] More recently, Milan Kundera, in a seminal essay, has stressed the shared cultural values and common cultural identity of the region.[10] Centuries of divide and rule by outside powers have failed to extinguish the idealistic hopes of co-operation entirely; on the other hand, we most of us share some complicity in our fate. As with the original founding of the European Union (or "Common Market" as it then was), the impulse to turn away from past aggression and address the prospect of a common future must reflect a deep commitment of the nations concerned, if it is to have any hope of success.

In contrast to the potentially benign influence of Herder, as suggested above, the philosopher's identification of *Volk* with *Kultur* proved a handy foundation for racist theories, while his qualitative attribution of ethnic characteristics (e.g. that the Slavs were "charitable, loyal, law-abiding" etc.) could ultimately be twisted to make arbitrary distinctions between *Herrenvolk* and *Sklavenvolk*. As Johnson remarks with the agreeable asperity that often characterises his book: "No one was interested [in] having a national past that did not surpass others in greatness."

The implications of Herder's ideas for the concept of progress are also marked by ambiguity. Nations could be torn between the realisation that they were slipping behind the West in all sorts of ways — economic, social and political—and a reluctance or inability to reform or replace ossified social structures. Yet capitalism, which is by definition dynamic, was likely to destroy (or at least diminish) those sacredly authentic and essentially static attributes of Herderian "national" (ethnic) identity, just as globalization today threatens to destroy the power of governments to control the most important areas of national policy. A 19th-century paradigm of the clash between modernisation and romanticized (but also self-interested) tradition is to be found in the story of Széchenyi and the toll that was to be levied for the projected Chain Bridge. The struggle to get the nobility (traditionally exempt from tax) to pay the toll like everybody else was part of the struggle to substitute for the privileges of the Hungarian nation the more equitable spread of obligations and rights that civil society requires. The bridge was also a symbol of the transition from tradition to modernization in that it was initiated by a reform-minded Hungarian nobleman, but the finance was raised from the ethnically non-correct Greek and Jewish bankers of Vienna. In modern societies (theoretically at least), what you can do becomes more important than who you are, and this (again in theory) should apply as much in the realm of race as in the realm of class. (The intelligent racist's way round this is summed up in the famous remark by the Christian Social Viennese mayor at the turn of the century: *"Wer ein Jud ist, bestimm ich"*). Old habits die hard, however, and in Central Europe it is doubtful if they die at all. Only recently, the inimitable Vladimir Meciar, Slovakia's nationalist premier, was quoted as rubbishing the tiresome do-gooding of George Soros, the millionaire philanthropist who has made such a signal contribution to helping Central Europe equip itself for the future: "Not only is he a Jew," complained Meciar indignantly, "but a Hungarian as well, and that's just too much!" [11]

Consideration of racial prejudice brings us naturally to the role of the Germans in Central Europe: *Herrenvolk* or barbarians? Imperialists or diligent and pious settlers? *Kulturbringer* and transferors of technology or *überhebliche* carpet-baggers? Although Johnson's treatment of the psycho-history of the Germans (more especial-

ly the Prussians) seems a shade too glib (e.g."... the psychopathology of groups is a controversial way of looking at history, (but) the relationship between subservience and aggression can be used to illustrate the dynamics of Germany's development"—p. 113), he is uniformly stimulating on the role of the Germans as settlers in the region. Virtually all were invited in—by medieval kings, who needed German expertise in mining, brewing and agriculture, or by the Habsburgs to settle the lands devastated and depopulated by Turkish wars. Herder's claim that the Germans had contributed "more than all others to the weal and woe of this continent" is no more than a statement of fact (what Central European could dissent from it?); in their adopted lands they contributed, at least until the Nazis arrived on the scene, far more of weal than of woe. It is true that in the rural areas they did not assimilate (this was often true of other ethnic groups with their own villages); in Pest-Buda however, Germans became completely Hungarianized by the second half of the 19th century (like Liszt or Lechner). In Poland and elsewhere there was a long tradition of cities like Cracow where a powerful German merchant community enjoyed legal autonomy under the Magdeburg Law, and indeed the city was substantially Germanized in terms of language and culture. In Prague there were historically parallel German and Czech cultures with some overlap and friction, finally clashing irrevocablyin the 1880's. The 19th-century citizen of Prague could see himself as a citizen of German Prague, of Czech Prague, or perhaps of Jewish Prague; alternatively (with varying degrees of emphasis), he might combine one of these identities with another, or even all three together. How, for example, is one to categorize Franz Kafka? As a German, a Czech or a Jewish writer? Or is he quintessentially a Central European writer?

From the time of the Enlightenment onwards, Central European Jews assimilated to German language and culture, and in 19th-century Hungary, they assimilated further to Hungarian culture, in which they became major creative forces. By throwing in their lot with the dominant political forces in the Dual Monarchy (Franz Joseph considered them the most loyal of his subjects and in recognition of this protected and supported them) Jews became equally successful in the free professions in Vienna and Budapest. For the Jewish communities in large swathes of Central Europe, the last and uniquely savage chapter of their history appeared to have been written by the Nazis'. Only in Hungary, where some 100,000 Jews survived out of a pre-war total of 787,000 have they continued with their traditionally catalytic cultural role. The loss of the Jewish cultural contribution in much of Central Europe through the Nazis' extermination programme is virtually incalculable. While Western academe has benefited from Central European Jewish refugees throughout the century, the region itself has suffered a cumulative, finally a cataclysmic, loss. Individual or national complicity in that loss makes it even harder for it to be integrated into the national consciousness; another ghost of the past has been created to haunt the future.

As for its German inhabitants, Central Europe has lost them almost as completely as it has lost its Jewish leavening: between 1945 and 1950 eleven million were expelled from areas that their forefathers had lived in for centuries, thousands perishing in the process; many more have drifted away in the interim, among them the Saxons of Transylvania who were sold to the West German government for some 12,000 Marks a head by Ceausescu. However, the loss of the Germans as citizens has been offset by the arrival of German

capital, first under late Communism, then in a great flood after 1989. Colonization gives way to economic imperialism, the politically acceptable twentieth-century substitute for colonies and sweated labour. Hungary having lost both world wars and both the peaces, is now the beneficiary of the highest level of German (partly Austrian) investment in the former East Bloc and the Czech Republic is similarly favoured. Perhaps if Germany turned most of the Central European states into new Federal States on the model of the former DDR, the dream of entering the European Union could be realized by the back door. Meanwhile the memory of expulsions is an embarrassment. President Havel`s apology in the name of the nation was not too popular with the Czechs and nobody else has thought it wise to pursue such a risky strategy. Once again an ambivalent attitude to a past full of complicities, large and small, makes a minefield of the present:

in tyranny's domain
you are the link in the chain,
you stink of him through and through,
the tyranny is you;[12]

Where is Central Europe?

I have left till last the problem that Johnson necessarily tackles at the beginning of his essay. So much ink has been spilt on this topic,[13] some of it in order to prove that there is no such thing as Central Europe, that Johnson is to be congratulated on producing something much better than *"aufgewarmtes Kraut"* in his treatment of it. The seminal study that has coloured almost all subsequent attempts at normative definition since it was first published in 1983, is Jenő Szűcs's *The Three Historical Regions of Europe.* This in turn supplanted Oscar Halecki's earlier four-regional division of the continent. Largely for political reasons, Szűcs's work was adapted and developed in the last phase of Communism: the all-embracing term "Central Europe" was now insisted on, precisely to indicate that the region is not now, as it never has been, the peripheral part of an eastern empire (meaning Russia).

Underlying what sometimes seems to an outsider to be a somewhat theological debate about nomenclature is the crucial idea that those nations rightfully claiming to be Central European belong to the western tradition in terms of their cultural and (with some reservations) their political identity. Thus the dividing line is drawn between Orthodoxy (where the state has nationalized the church) and Rome (later including Protestantism), where the state and the church co-existed in creative tension, allowing the ur-shoots of civil society to thrust up in the space between the two. The broad difference between "East" and "West", on this analysis, is between a society shaped by the state (the eastern model) and a state shaped by society (the western model). It was Szűcs's achievement to show how Central European nations with a traditionally (or potentially) western model of development oscillated between the two types of culture, striving towards the western model, but knocked back towards the East by historical setbacks such as the Turkish wars, dynastic struggles and economic factors; (an example of the latter was the impossibility of overseas colonial expansion that helped to externalize problematic factors for Britain and the Netherlands). Endre Ady's metaphor for Hungary as a victim of this oscillation syndrome likens the country to *"a river ferry, continually travelling between East and West, with always the sensation of not going anywhere but of being on the way back from the other bank."*

As far as economic factors are con-

cerned, some Hungarian historians have built on Szűcs' description of Central Europe as an area showing weak development of cities (which become centres of entrepreneurship and self-government) to formulate a paradigm of economic regions defined as center, semi-periphery and periphery. These rather schematic formulations do nevertheless supply some of the answers to the many puzzling questions of Central Europe, most notably the "backwardness" with which local intellectuals have traditionally been obsessed; also the constant frustration of attempts to mould the area into some sort of functioning unit, the least unsuccessful of which was that undertaken by the Habsburgs over 400 years.

Lonnie Johnson's thought-provoking and invariably judicious analysis of these matters should become required reading for students, as well as for veterans, of the Central European scene. The book takes the form of a themed chronological essay beginning with the Romans and ending with some remarks about the problems of transition in the area since 1989. As one would expect from the Oxford University Press, it comes with a full scholarly apparatus and index, but its clarity and admirable grasp of the broad sweep of historical narrative make it as suitable for the general reader as for specialists. It is particularly valuable for the way it allows the human element to emerge from the rubble of warfare, the clash of faiths, the aridity of legal and constitutional dispute. Thus we can see that the sense of loss, to which I have repeatedly referred, is a Central European's birthright and even a vital component of his identity. How, for instance, can anyone who has not lived in the region hope to mediate between the competing claims of an Hungarian patriot who remembers "Upper Hungary" as an integral part of historic Hungary for 1,000 years, and a Slovak patriot who sees it as a place where Hungarians spent 1,000 years repressing a Slovak nation? (For that matter, how can anyone who *does* live in the region hope to mediate in such a case?) Mutual loss is supposed to unite people in common mourning, but how does one cope with a mutual loss that divides them? One way that has been adopted by intellectuals is to invent, or re-invent the past; to picture the Polish Commonwealth as a "golden age" of British-style constitutionalism, for instance, or 17th-century Transylvania as a *Schlaraffenland* of ethnic and religious harmony, where Unitarians, Anabaptists and Orthodox, Catholics and Protestants, Hungarians, Jews, Germans and Rumanians all rubbed along together delightfully as in Jókai's "Golden Trasylvania". Real loss is partly assuaged by its transformation into loss that is largely imaginary insofar as it posits a state of affairs invented only in retrospect. The Viennese version of this process has been sketched in terms of the symbolism of the Ringstrasse: "...the Athenian parliament and Gothic city hall on the Ring still record the aspirations of nineteenth-century Liberals to build civic institutions which their imperial city never possessed and to connect these with a history that Vienna had never experienced."[14] The almost affectionate irony of these observations suits the Viennese milieu very well; but one Central European at least was more interested in building a bridge to the future than connecting with a fictitious past. His name was Count István Széchenyi and his cri de coeur sums up the frustration of the modernizer and the longings of a patriot: *"Sokan gondolják: Magyarország volt; én azt szeretem hinni: lesz!"* (Many think that Hungary once was: I want to believe "she will be!"). Perhaps we should hope the same for a "Confederation of Central Europe". ❧

NOTES

1 ■ Arthur Koestler: "The Lion and the Ostrich," introductory essay to *Suicide of a Nation.* Ed. Arthur Koestler, London, 1963, Repr. 1994.

2 ■ According to contemporary Austrian monks "no country had suffered such a tragedy and misery since the birth of Christ". The demographic loss in mountains and forests was 23.5 per cent, but on the plains up to 80 per cent of settlements were destroyed. See *A History of Hungary.* Ed. Peter Sugar et al. Indiana 1990. p.27.

3 ■ Elias Canetti: *The Torch in My Ear,* London 1990, pp. 234–5.

4 ■ William M. Johnston's *The Austrian Mind,* Berkeley, 1972, is the best-known attempt at such a cultural history, but is marred by a tendency to generalize from the particular or overemphasize colourful, but not necessarily controlling factors (e.g. the "*délibáb* mentality" in Hungary or "therapeutic nihilism" in Vienna).

5 ■ Translated by Edwin Morgan, *The New Hungarian Quarterly,* Vol. 143, No. 48, p. 74, Winter 1972.

6 ■ Quoted in Harold James: *A German Identity,* 1770–1990. Revised edition: London, 1990, p. 29, from which the Mickiewicz example is also taken.

7 ■ See Robert B. Pynsent: *Questions of Identity: Czech and Slovak Ideas of Nationality and Personality,* Budapest, London, New York, 1994, Ch. 4 for a discussion (albeit a controversial one) of Czech self-identification through martyrdom. An interesting modern example of using the martyr image to shame those who purport to share its cultural associations is the famous Black Christ picture painted by Ronald Harrison during the apartheid era in South Africa and a powerful weapon in the armoury of anti-apartheid campaigners. The picture is of a crucified Chief Albert Luthuli with John Vorster and Hendrik Verwoerd shown as Roman soldiers standing by. Luthuli was former head of the ANC and a Nobel Prize-winner.

8 ■ Sir Isaiah Berlin: *Vico and Herder: Two Studies in the History of Ideas,* N.Y. 1976, p. 176.

9 ■ See Csaba G. Kiss: *Central European Writers on Central Europe,* in George Schöpflin & Nancy Wood Eds., *In Search of Central Europe,* Oxford 1989, p. 129–130.

10 ■ Milan Kundera: "The Tragedy of Central Europe", in *New York Review of Books,* 26 April 1984.

11 ■ Quoted in an article on George Soros by Peter Martin, in *Die Presse,* 2nd August 1997, p. 3.

12 ■ From "A Sentence About Tyranny", by Gyula Illyés, written in 1950, which first appeared during the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. Translated by George Szirtes, *The Hungarian Quarterly,* Vol. 36, No. 139, Autumn 1995, pp. 15–20.

13 ■ See for example: George Schöpflin & Nancy Wood, Eds.: *In Search of Central Europe* (Oxford, 1989); Jacques Rupnik: *The Other Europe* (London 1988); Piotr S. Wandycz: *The Price of Freedom* (London and N.Y. 1992); Philip Longworth: *The Making of Eastern Europe* (Basingstoke, 2nd Ed 1997). Many of the studies concerned with economic and political developments in the former East Bloc countries de facto recognize a Central European entity with common traditions and characteristics.

14 ■ Anthony Grafton: *The New York Review of Books,* August 14, 1997. Vol XLIV, Number 13. p. 50, in an article on the social history of Berlin entitled "Hullo to Berlin" (an ironic reference to the title of Christopher Isherwood's famous Berlin stories, *Goodbye to Berlin).*

George Gömöri

Edmund Wilson: The Hungarian Connection

I was still living in Oxford, having obtained a prestigious higher degree in Modern Literature the year before, and working as Research Assistant to my friend and mentor, Max Hayward. It must have been Max who directed my attention to a long essay in the April 20, 1963 number of the *The New Yorker,* a journal not widely read in England. The essay had a strange title "My 50 years with Dictionaries and Grammars", but its author was no stranger to students of Russian or East European affairs: it was Edmund Wilson, whose works included the seminal book *To the Finland Station.* Now Wilson had the reputation of a consummate polyglott but, I, for one, had no idea that having learned Russian and Hebrew he had also become interested in learning Hungarian.

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But it was exactly this information that transpired from the erudite but very entertaining essay in *The New Yorker.* It turned out that Wilson's interest in my native language began some years earlier (in the late Fifties or early Sixties?) when two of his plays were translated into Hungarian. Having received the translations which he could not read, he was annoyed; in addition various American-Hungarian friends and even casual acquaintances who could speak Hungarian "had for years been crying up to me the brilliance of Hungarian poetry—especially that of Endre Ady". Here came the surprise: once Edmund Wilson was able to read some Ady in the original, he decided that this was indeed a great poet and that the praise of all those Hungarian informants was well justified.

In the rest of his essay (out of forty-three pages, Hungarian is discussed on only twelve, in two places) Wilson praised Hungarian as a pleasant and yet powerful language ("when written well it is neat and terse") and bemoaned the fact that there were hardly any good Hungarian grammars available. He also pointed out the American public's general ignorance of Hungarian culture. An educated person may have heard Petőfi's name but he wouldn't have read him and Jókai, who around the turn of the century was still a

popular writer in America, was later completely forgotten. Ferenc Molnár was the only writer from those parts whose name stuck in the mind of the "culturally intuned" Americans and even he reached fame mostly on account of just one play, *Liliom* which provided the scenario for the musical *Carousel*. Edmund Wilson did not suggest ways to improve the situation, but simply by describing it drew attention to the existing sad state of affairs.

At the time I was regularly writing for *Irodalmi Újság*, a Hungarian emigré journal published first in London then later in Paris, and it was there that I reported (on June 15, 1963) my discovery of Wilson's Hungarian interest. My article did not go unnoticed by fellow-writers; I remember László Cs. Szabó, who at the time worked for the Hungarian section of the BBC, ringing me excitedly from London, enquiring about further details. From Max Hayward, who knew Wilson personally, I got the American writer's address and decided to write him a letter. I must have asked him whether he knew certain things about modern Hungarian literature which were not mentioned in his essay, for the fol-lowing answer came from Cambridge, Massachusetts, dated June 5, 1963:

"Dear Mr Gömöri,

thank you for your letter. I know about Ady's role in the nationalist movement and I know about Attila József, though I hadn't read him much. I haven't had much time to work on Hungarian and am far from fluent in the language; but I am hoping to speak some when in Hungary during 1964. I should be glad to meet you but I am sailing for Europe at the end of August—not from New York but from Montreal.

Őszinte tisztelettel (in Hungarian)

Edmund Wilson"

It seems as if I'd suggested a meeting to Wilson, but in the event I reached the New World by boat exactly the same time when he left from Montreal for Europe. (I was appointed to a teaching post for one year in Berkeley, at the University of California). Wilson's summer trip to Europe included Paris, Rome and Budapest, and he wrote up his impressions in a travelogue/diary published in the new, extended edition of his *Europe without Baedeker* (New York, 1966 and London, 1967). The Budapest diary runs to fifty pages and makes entertaining reading even thirty-odd years after the actual visit.

First of all, Wilson describes his first impressions of Budapest. He stays in the Hotel Gellért, one of the city's oldest and (in those days) most "elegant" hotels which he finds "comfortable" and with a good cuisine. It is a cosy island of foreign tourists, most of whom are "rather crass Central European businessmen and fat Germanic women". Outside the hotel there is little life; Wilson makes the interesting point that the Hungarians whom he met in the West were always "dynamic", whereas here they are listless and "rather stupified". As for the city itself, which was described to him "as the most beautiful city in Europe", he finds it strange and dramatic but also somewhat Eastern and faintly "barbaric". He notes that people are badly dressed and there are comparatively few cars on the roads and concludes "this capital, at the present time, is still rather sad and empty" (p. 421).

Edmund Wilson is an American who speaks Russian, so he is not just an innocent tourist in Hungary—he is also interested in Hungarian attitudes to the Soviet Union and to those uninvited, permanent guests, the Russians. Let us quote a passage from his diary. "I heard little said about Russia. But my personal reaction in

Budapest was a rearoused antagonism toward the Soviet Union such as I had not experienced since the banning of *Zhivago* and the death of Boris Pasternak. One felt that an energetic people had been bludgeoned and partly crippled by an alien hand, that they were still, in decisive ways, at the mercy of a great stupid power..." (p. 425). Wilson mentions the fact that Hungarian resentment against the Russians goes back to 1848–49 and gives a brief but basically accurate description of the political changes since 1945, with special reference to the role of the Russians. He also notes that the compulsory teaching of Russian in schools is "mostly... detested" and that young Hungarian schoolchildren find learning it (as a first foreign language) rather difficult.

This observation is followed by another, for a linguist quite fascinating, one; namely, that Hungarian is really a much easier language to learn for a foreigner than Russian. For, says Wilson, Hungarian is "an almost perfectly logical instrument codified as a literary language as late as the eighteen-thirties by a practical committee of scholars, whereas Russian was developed in a hit-or-miss fashion—a language composed of idioms, with a queer and irregular grammar" (p. 426–427). As for the political attitudes of Hungarians, the American writer senses a kind of broad support for post-1945 reforms but no love for the one-party system and, in the case of a future Russian withdrawal, can envisage some kind of a compromise between "socialism" and capitalism". (What he could not foresee, of course, was the total collapse of the party-states of Eastern Europe and the USSR in 1989 and the concomitant loss of faith in "socialist" solutions.)

In order to characterize the Hungarian language, Wilson quotes a long passage of Gyula Illyés's which he translates from an essay in French. In the chapter "How to Say 'You' in Hungarian" he gives a most amusing description of the baffling question of addressing people of different age, rank and familiarity and ends it with the translation of a humorous sketch by Frigyes Karinthy, in which two men meet on the street who have known each other for some time but who for some reason are not quite sure whether to address each other formally or in familiar terms. Of Wilson's Hungarian contacts only one, Gábor Devecseri, Homer's best Hungarian translator is named; indeed, Wilson gives an account of a long conversation with Devecseri, in which the latter states: "We are a nation of translators", and reads Hungarian translations of Shelley and Keats to his visitor to show how pleasant they sound in Hungarian.

Outside Budapest, Wilson visited only Debrecen, where he met several members of the Faculty of English at the local University. One of them (a lady scholar), "the friend who had been helping me with Hungarian", reacted cautiously to Wilson's comment that "it was sad to think of all the brilliant Hungarian scientists and writers and musicians that they had lost through emigration" (p. 461). Her reply was "We have hidden resources". And indeed, in the final chapter of his Hungarian diary, though describing the Hungarian intellectuals whom he met as "sober, serious-minded and discreet", Wilson feels that behind all this "chastening" there still remained much of "the passion, the dynamic force which have made Hungary... such a constantly humming powerhouse" (p. 466). So for all the negative impressions listed in the first part of his diary, Edmund Wilson still found much hope for the future of this "strangely isolated country", which gave so many important scholars and scientists to the world in our century.

In the autumn of 1964 I got a one-year Research Fellowship at Harvard and soon afterwards made the acquaintance of Zoltán Haraszti. He was a Hungarian writer and critic of Jewish extraction who had left Hungary in 1920 and made his career as an American scholar and the Keeper of Rare Books in the Boston Public Library. I mention Haraszti's name here (he died in the late 1970s) because he told me that he knew Edmund Wilson quite well and it was he who first drew his attention to Ady's poetry. (In *The New Yorker* article Wilson made a remark which I am quite certain referred to Haraszti: "A Hungarian who was young in that period said to me that Ady was a "state of mind"). Soon afterwards—in early November—I wrote again to Wilson who was at the time at the Centre for Advanced Studies at Wesleyan University. I had a query to him about a job prospect for a Hungarian friend and also, rather foolishly, suggested to him that he should try to translate some poems by Ady. His short reply is dated November 9, 1964 and apart from an answer to my query it contains just one sentence worth quoting in the context of his "Hungarian interest"; "I am sorry that I can't undertake to translate Ady". Alas, Endre Ady is still awaiting his truly gifted (or at any rate, suitable) English or American translator.

Edmund Wilson's 1964 visit to Hungary was, by the way, mentioned by Iván Boldizsár, founder and long-time Editor of *The New Hungarian Quarterly,* in an essay published in 1973 (No. 52). As Boldizsár was abroad during Wilson's Hungarian visit, the American critic met Miklós Vajda, the literary editor of the journal, and it was only in 1966, during a trip to the United States that Boldizsár finally made Wilson's acquaintance, visiting him in Talcottville. Boldizsár's 1973 reminiscences about this visit, "A Day at Edmund Wilson's", NHQ 52 (pp. 102–125), are a masterpiece of evasion—he freely discusses Wilson's interest in Hungarian literature and argues about the fine points of American politics but carefully avoids any hint of Wilson's less than enthusiastic account of the political situation in Hungary. ❧

János Kárpáti

From the *Ungaresca* to the *Allegro barbaro*

Responses to Hungarian Music Abroad

"What is it, one wonders, that has prompted foreigners from time to time to don the Hungarian cloak? Surely it must have been a friendly curiosity or an attraction towards what they knew as or felt to be Hungarian. To us, how they viewed us, what they discerned in us, and how their musical impressions of us changed over time cannot be a matter of indifference." Thus wrote Zoltán Kodály in 1943, in his foreword to Dr Margit Prahács's bibliography, *Magyar témák a külföldi zenében"* (Hungarian Themes in Foreign Music).[1] It is of these "musical impressions of us" that I would like to present an overview, highlighting some of the types—even stereotypes—rather than a detailed and finely-honed analysis. The world loves to simplify the image it has of individual nationalities. We should not be surprised, then, if the image it has of Hungarian music is similarly more simple than the music itself. Yet the opinion of the outside observer is indeed important to us, precisely because of this tendency to condense all that is characteristic. At the outset, I would like to emphasize that this historical overview will inevitably be deficient, since I have focused mainly on the period closest to us, the last one hundred years, and indeed, more specifically on Bartók and the reception of Bartók, for his case reveals a number of characteristic features. At the same time, however, any examination of responses to Hungarian music has to take place on two levels: in the first period we examine predominantly the extent to which the music itself was adopted, while during the last one hundred years the critics' views take precedence.

By way of introduction, here are some surprising facts and figures from Margit Prahács's bibliography. Her material is presented to the reader in two categories, the first covering compositions with a *Hungarian* theme or title and the second those with a *Gypsy* theme or title. It should be noted that this distinction is not made on ethnic grounds, but in order to reflect more faithfully the typical 19th-century view—indeed, misconception—regarding what constituted Hungarian and Gypsy music, respectively. In the bibliography by Margit Prahács the Hungarian group comprises some 1,300 works by nearly 900

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composers, while the group classified as Gypsy includes some 800 works by 670 composers. These figures are of course only symptomatic in value; the large numbers merely show how popular Hungarian or Hungarian-style music was and do not imply genuine knowledge of it. In any case, Hungarian (-style) music clearly enjoyed pride of place among Europe's "exotica" in the last century, and is only surpassed in number by the bibliography of Spanish-style pieces.

The first known work referring to Hungarian style appears in the mid-16th century in a Polish collection of pieces in organ tabulature and bears the title *Hayduczki,* i.e., *Hajdú Dance.* A little later one finds an *Ungarischer Tanz* (Hungarian Dance) in a collection of lute music published in Strasbourg, and in another we find a number of pieces with the title *Passamezzo ungaro.* From the end of the 16th century onwards, we find similar pieces cropping up increasingly often in German, Italian, Flemish and Czech collections of dance tunes, mostly composed for organ or lute, and generally with the title *Ungaresca.* Thanks to the work of Ottó Gombosi and Bence Szabolcsi, we now know that, in their particular structure and harmonization, both recalling the folk traditions of bagpipe music, these dances may be considered as an evocation of Hungarian music, although they were composed abroad, and are similar to western European dances such as the *allemanda* and the *padovana.*[2] The epithet Hungarian thus stood for a particular type of music pointing to Eastern Europe. It is worth mentioning that another Eastern European theme also emerged, in conjunction with the *ungaresca:* the Polish polacca, which eventually evolved into the *polonaise* so familiar in 18th–19th century Europe. In their musical characteristics, however, the Hungarian and the Polish dances were definitely different.

The road which leads from the *ungaresca* to the new type of Hungarian dance music which emerged at the end of the 18th century, the *verbunkos,* is not a straight one, although the link is just discernible in the roots of the music, in the characteristic dance rhythms and melodic construction which point eastwards. The dance tunes by virtuoso Gypsy violinists, such as Bihari, and trained musicians such as Lavotta and Csermák, quickly reached Vienna and soon served as models for similar works by Austrian, German and Bohemian musicians. In the Vienna music publishers' catalogues between 1770 and 1880, there are hundreds of titles to be found like *Echt ungarische Nationaltänze* (Authentic Hungarian National Dances), *Rondeau. hongrois* (Hungarian rondeau), *Ungarische Werbungstänze* (Hungarian Verbunkos Dances), *Rákóczy-Marsch* (Rákóczy March).[3] In most cases their titles reveal the composer's intentions, as in Haydn's *Rondo all'Ongarese* or Schubert's *Divertissement à l'hongroise;* there are also some pieces which appear to have arrived at Hungarian musical themes almost spontaneously, possibly as a result of the pervasive influence of *verbunkos* music, such as the 3rd movement of Mozart's Violin Concerto in A major, or the closing movements of Beethoven's 3rd and 7th symphonies.

The Hungaricisms of the romantic era, which played an important role in the work of composers such as Berlioz, Liszt, and Brahms, would merit a study unto themselves. Although the way in which they encountered Hungarian music was different in each case, all three of them felt drawn to the Hungarian dances or songs as material inviting arrangement; the resulting compositions contributed substantially to shaping the image of Hungarian

music for no less than a century. At the same time, there are two issues underlying the 19th-century's fascination with Hungarian music, which cannot be discussed in detail here, but which should at least be outlined. The issue of Hungarian versus Gypsy music, mentioned above, is one. Since the *verbunkos* and *csárdás* dances and the popular songs *(nóta)* were played almost exclusively by Gypsy musicians, even Liszt himself fell victim to a serious misunderstanding. Although the tunes he adapted for his *Hungarian Rhapsodies* were a mixture of both genuine Hungarian traditional melodies and popular tunes, in a theoretical work *(Des bohémiens et de leur musique en Hongrie)* published later in Paris, he classifed these melodies as being of Gypsy origin and thus lent the weight of his reputation to a completely erroneous notion—one which has survived to this day.[4]

The other problem lies in the interpretation of the "folk" origins of the *csárdás* and the *nóta.* Enough has been written on this subject already to fill a library, so I will limit myself to mentioning the damaging effect which so-called "Hungarian folk tunes", composed and promoted by amateurs, had on the image of Hungarian music abroad. Great masters such as Brahms used their discrimination to select from this pool and ennobled this material in adapting it. Interpreted by the Gypsy ensembles of the cafés and salons, however, the end-of-century Hungarian popular tunes *(nóta)*, spread unhindered all over the cities of Europe and this gradually turned the more noble face of Hungarian music Liszt and Brahms had created into something altogether sentimental and tacky.

The popularity of Hungarian music around the turn of the century was thus a dubious one and the more discerning public sometimes and quite rightly rejected it.

Béla Bartók started to compose in the first decade of the 20th century, with a tone redolent of 19th-century romanticism, and this did not prove altogether successful. His symphonic poem, *Kossuth,* was rather coldly received in Manchester in 1904, while his Rhapsody, following in the footsteps of Liszt, merely received a certificate of merit at the Rubenstein International Competition in Paris in 1905. Today these fiascos may be regarded as symbolic, since they showed clearly the cul-de-sac down which the young musician was heading, and which he was soon to extricate himself from, mainly due to the invigorating influence of Hungarian peasant music and the new French music. As he himself states in his autobiography, *"I recognized... that the melodies which are erroneously considered to be Hungarian folk music—but in reality are more or less trivial, rustic-style compositions—are of little inherent interest, and so in 1905 I set about collecting peasant music, which was hitherto completely unknown. I had the great fortune of finding a companion in this undertaking, in the person of my colleague, the outstanding musician, Zoltán Kodály."*[5]

The year 1910 was a milestone on the parallel roads on which Bartók and Kodály had embarked. Around the same time as the two each presented an entire evening of their music in Budapest, a "Hungarian Festival" was held in Paris, at which Henry Expert, one of the most influential French musicologists, gave a lecture on the new Hungarian music followed by a concert presenting works by Leó Weiner, Árpád Szendy, Zoltán Kodály, Béla Bartók, Ödön Mihalovich and Ernst von Dohnányi.

To continue on the subject of how Hungarian music was received in France, we can turn here to a quotation which is telling indeed: *"Among the most ardent aficionados of the new Hungarian music is*

Michael D[imitri] Calvocoressi, [of Greek birth] the renowned music critic and aesthetician, who recently gave a series of lectures in the hall of the École des Hautes Études Sociales on 'Tendencies in Modern Music', including the new Hungarian music... Calvocoressi prefaced his exposé with Schumann's remark that 'the time is coming when we will see a nationalization of music...' Well, Schumann's prediction has come true. This is now the predominant tendency throughout Europe. The movement started in Russia with Stravinsky, closely followed by the Spaniards and the Hungarians."[6] This lecture took place in the 1913–1914 season, not long after the scandal of the Russian Ballet's first performance of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* had thrown the French capital into a ferment. This, however, suggests that it was not simply a question of the emergence of music which had a national flavour, as Calvocoressi had suggested, but rather the arrival of something wild and redolent of the temperament of a strange, alien world. People were at first taken aback by the relentless dominance of rhythm, but they soon grew to accept it and it was not long before they had come to expect it in all music originating in the "east".

In a similar way, Bartók's piano piece entitled *Allegro barbaro* came to be seen as a message from distant realms, unfamiliar and savage. According to Kodály, when Bartók composed this piano piece in 1911, he called it simply Allegro, and it was not until later, recalling a reference by one of the critics at the Hungarian Festival in Paris—*"ces jeunes barbares hongrois"*—that the name occurred to him. There is no written trace of the French critic's words, but we do have a feuilleton, published in 1920, by Émile Vuillermoz, one of the musicians who was present, which says essentially the same, and in fact also refers to Kodály: *"In the presence of the unusually free style of these young Hungarian composers, their candour and their delicious harmonic sensibility, many listeners experienced a feeling of surprise mingled with a hint of unease. How can one classify these savages? How does one find an aesthetic category for this subtle barbarity, this combination of spontaneity and refinement?"*[7]

Bartók's *Allegro barbaro* thus became much more than simply a short piece for piano; it became virtually a symbol. This is reflected in the strange route taken by the publication of the piece took. First it appeared in 1913 as a musical supplement to the literary journal *Nyugat*, which is an indication that it was regarded within Hungary too as a kind of statement intended for an audience which did not only include musicians. Six years later it was also published in the Vienna music journal *Musikblätter des Anbruch* as an example of Hungarian avant-garde music. The records show that of all Bartók's works, this was the one most often played in France, and we know that Bartók himself liked to play it at his concerts abroad, because he felt that this piece indeed managed to deliver his "message" to his audiences.

Bartók's real conquest of Europe began in 1922, when he performed in England and in Paris. Calvocoressi, mentioned above, had paved the way for him in London, but his success was ensured by the efforts of two young composers and critics, Cecil Gray and Peter Warlock, who launched themselves into the task of understanding and publicizing Bartók's music with a combination of sensitivity and enthusiasm which was quite remarkable. Immediately prior to Bartók's arrival, Warlock published a study in *The Musical Times* presenting Bartók not in isolation, but in the company of Kodály and László Lajtha, while at the same time making no secret which of the three he considered the best. *"It is... in his two String*

Quartets... that Bartók's singular genius is revealed most clearly. Much fine chamber music has been written in the last few years, but Bartók appears to be the only composer who, working on the lines indicated by Beethoven in his last Quartets, has achieved the same technical perfection in the expression of original ideas in an idiom that is all his own."[8]

If he was well received in London, he was even more warmly received in Paris shortly afterwards, where Henry Prunières, the editor of the old and venerable journal, *Revue Musicale,* was the organizer of the soirée. The press had little to say in response to the concert, but the dinner and private recital at the home of the editor was an event recorded in the annals of musical history. According to a letter written by Bartók, [the dinner] was attended *"by over 'half the leading composers of the world'-that is, Ravel, Szymanowski, Stravinsky—as well as a few young (notorious) Frenchmen whom you would not know."*[9]

During the 1920s Bartók's name and the new Hungarian music which, naturally enough, he represented was known not only in London and Paris but virtually all over Europe. His works were given a permanent place in the festivals of the International Society for New Music (IGNM), and he himself performed repeatedly in the great concert halls of Europe, notably the First Piano Concerto, written in 1926 and the Second, completed in 1931. The favourable manner in which these works were received was in no small part due to the fact that they also contained the eastward-pointing tonality of the *Allegro barbaro* and this provided a key for foreign audiences.

Let me quote from a review which appeared in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* in 1929: *"Just as, in his study of folk songs, [Bartók] is searching for authenticity, he strives as a composer to express the national voice. There is a real gulf between this and the Hungaricisms known and loved in the salons of Western Europe; his compositions touch the gateway to the East. Although his path shows to some extent the influence of Schoenberg, the direction bears the hallmark of folk music which, with its unbridled harmonies, is clearly closer to the East."*[10]

As regards the reception Hungarian music received in the German-speaking world, constraints of space allow me to draw attention here to just two important, albeit somewhat contradictory, critical responses. The first one is the unreserved admiration for the national school, which drew on folk sources, and it can be illustrated by a single quotation, from an article by a Dr Walter Jacobs in the *Kölnische Zeitung* in February 1928 on the subject of the performance of Kodály's *Psalmus Hungaricus. "It is understandable why the Hungarians perceive this to be a work of national importance, since they expect the recent research on folk music and related grass-roots arts to lead to a strengthening of Magyar music, which has for so long lain dormant while only Gypsy music was disseminated throughout Europe as "Hungarian". Kodály, like Bartók, is a collector [of folk music], but he keeps his distance from the perversities of modern musical practice; in his music the Hungarians find their folk and sacred musical traditions revived, while we too are capitvated by its very strangeness, with the Byzantine Church-style choral unison at the beginning of this work and the plainsong-type melody at the end."*[11]

The attitude of the Schoenberg circle is not quite so unambiguous. Thanks to the publications of János Breuer we now have a clear picture of the relationship between Bartók and Schoenberg and of the critical activity of Adorno, set out in his reflections

on the aesthetics of using folk music in art music and, related to this, his opinions on the work of Bartók and Kodály. Schoenberg's *Harmonielehre*, published in 1911, cites two bars of an early piano piece by Bartók as an illustration of the new harmonic direction. Even more significant as an indication of this recognition is the extent to which Schoenberg and his circle cultivated the works of Bartók between 1919 and 1921, a response to the composer's work hitherto without precedent. At that time a society, founded by Schoenberg under the name of *Musikalische Privataufführungen*, used to meet in Vienna with the aim of making quality contemporary music accessible to its members through private rehearsal-type performances. No fewer than eleven of Bartók's compositions were included in the programmes of these private concerts, clearly demonstrating the open-mindedness of the organizers—Schoenberg and his acolytes—who despite their fundamentally anti-folk aesthetic principles nevertheless included several compositions by Bartók based on Romanian and Hungarian folk music.[12]

Adorno, however, who alongside his philosphical essays had also studied composition under Alban Berg, was implacable in passing judgement on the use of folk music: *"...Only by achieving the psychological self-annihilation of the romantic Ego, by culpably rendering it absolute, by atomizing it into coincidence, only by the cataclysmic demise of the remaining world of form does the problem of new perception of folk music become radical, and all new folk music becomes kitsch, irrespective of whether or not it was intended to be that. All music masquerading as folk music today is serving some ideological purpose; the music of the people, meanwhile, prostrates itself without further thought before a reified society. He who [claims to] writes folk music today is a cheat; on the other hand, he who thinks he can rescue folk music by using elements of it in his own material is a romantic of the sort of romanticism which is as passé as the folk-song itself."*[13]

Adorno wrote this in 1925, before National-Socialist notions of *völkisch*/national folk culture had made their appearance. Adorno—thanks no doubt to his thorough schooling in philosophy and aesthetics and his clear logic—felt the presence of a real danger. For all that, he discussed Bartók on a completely different aesthetic level and acknowledged that the Hungarian composer was, after Schoenberg, one of the great masters of the age. *"Bartók yielded readily to the seductive charms of musical impressionism, but in such simplified form [...] that he could do no serious damage to the musical features of impressionism. He first broke through to his own centre with the poundingly brief Suite for Piano, op.14, and the* Allegro barbaro, *then made great strides forward with the grandiosely beautiful and quite specific 2nd String Quartet, op.17, and his Études, op.18; and now, with his two Violin Sonatas [...] he appears to have reached his goal...",* wrote Adorno, also in 1925.[14] In 1929, he devoted a whole article to Bartók's 3rd String Quartet. *"This is without doubt the best work by the Hungarian master... The opening Lento, which has some similarity to his 2nd Violin Sonata, is also organized in a similar fashion, in "intonations", [rather than following the sonata style structure]; freely flowing imitations preserve it from disintegrating into mere improvization; and then the Allegro barbaro, over and over again, but this time as pure movement, punctuated by the autonomy of the melodic lines..."*[15]

Adorno's collected reflections on aesthetics were published in book form after the Second World War, under the title *Philosophy of the New Music.* In it he orga-

nizes the music of the first half of the 20th century around two distinct poles: the progressive, embodied by the music of Schoenberg, and restoration, represented by Stravinsky. Bartók, however, he places somewhere between the two, in a kind of no-man's-land, arguing that Béla Bartók was striving to reconcile Schoenberg and Stravinsky, although his best works—in terms of their density and integrity—are far superior to the works of the latter.[16]

This idea of "reconciliation" was interpreted rather as a "compromise", in other words, pejoratively, by the post-war French theoretician, René Leibowitz, who condemned Bartók roundly—while not disputing his musical genius— for not taking the path which, according to Leibowitz, was the only true one, that of twelve-tone composition, and for not having managed to extricate himself from the "pernicious" influence of folk music.[17] Perhaps Leibowitz's views, expressed with much less depth than those of Adorno, would not be worth mentioning if they had not found such supporters as Pierre Boulez, and adversaries such as András Mihály, the Hungarian composer and politico-musicologist, who at that time still adhered faithfully to Marxist ideas.[18]

In contrast to the extreme view taken by René Leibowitz, who would have liked to purge Bartók's life work of all folk-inspired elements or at least push those works to the fringe, András Mihály produced a peculiar defence of Bartók in 1950. He saw Bartók's greatest value precisely in those works which were most openly folk-inspired, and was ready to let go, as it were, the great masterpieces, branding them as the products of the "decadent bourgeois avant-garde".[19]

This confrontation reflected a particular perspective on art and aesthetics arising from the Cold War. On the one side there were the intransigent and dogmatic dodecaphonists, who built into the foundations of their aesthetics the principle of political dissent; lined up against them on the other side were the Zhdanovian Marxists, who took elements of Nazi *"völkisch"* cultural precepts straight over into their idealized notion of socialist culture, all the while using anti-fascist slogans and decrying bourgeois decadence. Bartók's oeuvre did not, of course, deserve to be divided up in this way, but there were advantages for both sides. What the dodecaphonists regarded as worthless, the Marxists claimed as their own. It is a characteristic cock-a-snook of history, that the most important figures in this debate later changed their views; András Mihály came to accept the "whole" of Bartók in the 60s and 70s and, he and his ensemble presented the works of Schoenberg, Berg, Webern and Boulez in Hungary, including those which had hitherto been banned. Meanwhile, Pierre Boulez's magnificent interpretations, as conductor, of Bartók's orchestral works, bore witness to the great esteem in which he held the Hungarian composer.

The generations of Hungarian composers emerging after the war found themselves under a dual pressure for over fifteen years: the weight of the Bartók legacy and the impossibility of obtaining information from the rest of Europe. However, 1956 was a turning-point for Hungarian music in terms of its international links: György Ligeti opted for exile, which meant breaking with Hungarian musical life, but adapting completely to the contemporary Europe, in the environment of the Darmstadt school and the electronic studio in Cologne. György Kurtág, in contrast, stayed at home, but went to study in Paris in 1958, and in doing so began his work as a composer afresh. To those who remained at home, Rudolf Maros was a key figure in the 1960s; he, by maintaining

good relations abroad, was able to bring vital information into the country, while at the same time representing post-war Hungarian music at a high standard in the international arena.

The same decade saw the reappearance of Hungarian music on the European podium. Ligeti was of course already well known and his refugee status further enhanced the favourable reception he was given. All the more significant, therefore, were the successes achieved at festivals of contemporary music and at competitive events by other musicians who had remained in Hungary. Compositions by András Szőllősy, Zsolt Durkó and Attila Bozay, for example, all took first place or at least a place in the top rankings in the large international field at the annual International Rostrum of Composers in Paris.

Nowadays, of course, it is not possible to speak of a "Hungarian school". According, however, to Rolf Haglund, a Swedish critic, if one drew up a list of the fifty most important composers in the world, at least half-a-dozen Hungarian names would be among them. Writing in a Swedish newspaper in 1981, he said: "Meeting Jeney and his music has been such an experience for me as if one of the most outstanding Gurus of the music, let us say John Cage or Anton Webern, had suddenly appeared among us here in Borås."[20]

If Rolf Haglund would have included half-a-dozen Hungarian composers in an international list of 50 at the beginning of the 1980s, the number today would have to be changed. Out of, say 10 world greats there would be at least two Hungarians, Ligeti and Kurtág. This is no reflection of personal bias, but the more or less generally accepted international opinion, judging by the prestigious international awards, the many concert series, festivals, recordings of their works, not to mention the conference papers on their music and appraisals of their work in the literature. While their careers are far from parallel, the 1990 Autumn Festival in Paris brought them together, and a whole issue of the journal *Contrechamps,* which has links to the Boulez circle, was devoted jointly to their work. In the introductory study, Philippe Albéra not only traces the common traditions, unpicks the threads leading to Bartókian experience in a manner which is quite out of the ordinary, but identifies a particular *couleur hongroise* in the work of both of them. *"In the case of Kurtág this is embodied in a type of instrumental arrangement which gives preference to unusual and heterogeneous combinations of tone; the cimbalom and the mandolin, which remind one of the popular orchestras of Eastern Europe, play a central role. With Ligeti, the* 'couleur hongroise', *which was relegated to the background in 1956 [...] re-emerges strongly in the 1980s, but is extended to include other types of traditional music from around the world."*[21] As we know, the author is referring here to the extraordinarily fruitful influence on Ligeti's musical idiom of his encounter with the complex rhythms and micropolyphony of African tribal music.

Observed from Hungary, we would hardly consider these traits as characteristically Hungarian, but it appears that the acoustics are different abroad— and this applies also to the other contemporary Hungarian composers who are conversant in the language of Europe. While for around four hundred years one stereotype or another was used to identify the Hungarian character, in the last fifty years—in a world that has been stretched and broadened by ideas, technology and systems disavowing any national character or at least freed from it —the vaguest of references is sufficient to conjure up associations with the Hungarianness of the past. ❧

NOTES

1 ■ *Magyar témák a külföldi zenében* (Hungarian Themes in Foreign Music), ed. Margit Prahács. Budapest, Magyarságtudományi Intézet, 1943.

2 ■ Ottó Gombosi, under the heading "Ungaresca", in: *Zenei lexikon* (Dictionary of Music), ed. B. Szabolcsi–A. Tóth. Budapest, Győző N., 1930–31. Bence Szabolcsi: *A XVII. század magyar világi dallamai* (Secular Hungarian Tunes of the 17th Century), Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1959.

3 ■ Alexander Weinmann: "Magyar zene a bécsi zeneműpiacon" (Hungarian Music on the Vienna Music Market), In: *Magyar Zenetörténeti Tanulmányok Szabolcsi Bence 70. születésnapjára* (Studies on the History of Hungarian Music on the Occasion of Bence Szabolcsi's 70th Birthday), ed. Ferenc Bónis. Budapest, Zeneműkiadó, 1969, pp.131–177.

4 ■ Paris, 1859. On how this problem has persisted, see: Bálint Sárosi: "Párizsi ítélet: a magyar népies zene a cigányoké" (Judgement of Paris: Hungarian popular music belongs to the Gypsies), *Muzsika,* XL, March 1997, pp. 3–6, and its English version the present issue of *The Hungarian Quarterly,* pp. 133–139.

5 ■ From his autobiography, written in German (1921–23), in: *Bartók Béla összegyűjtött írásai I.* (Béla Bartók's Collected Writings I.), ed. by András Szőllőssy. Budapest, Zeneműkiadó, 1967, p. 9.

6 ■ *Zeneközlöny,* vol. XII, No.18. See János Demény: "Bartók Béla művészi kibontakozásának évei (1906–1914)" (The Years of Béla Bartók's Artistic Development), in: *Zenetudományi Tanulmányok Liszt Ferenc és Bartók Béla emlékére* (Studies in Musicology in Commemoration of Franz Liszt and Béla Bartók), vol. 3. Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1955, p. 440.

7 ■ "Le tombeau de Claude Debussy", *Le Temps,* 2 décembre 1920. Cited by Denijs Dille: "L'Allegro barbaro de Bartók", *Studia Musicologica,* vol. XII, 1970, p. 5.

8 ■ *The Musical Times,* March 1, 1922, p.165.

9 ■ From a letter to his mother, April 15, 1922. *Béla Bartók's Letters,* ed. by János Demény, Budapest, Corvina Press, 1971, p. 160.

10 ■ February 4, 1929. Cited by János Demény: *"Bartók Béla pályája delelőjén (1927–1940)"* (Béla Bartók at the Height of his Career, In: *Zenetudományi Tanulmányok Liszt Ferenc és Bartók Béla emlékére* (Studies in Musicology in Commemoration of Franz Liszt and Béla Bartók), vol. 10. Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1962, p. 318.

11 ■ *Kodály-dokumentumok I: Németország 1910–1944* (Kodály Documents I: Germany 1910–1944), ed. by János Breuer. Budapest, Zeneműkiadó, 1976, p. 181.

12 ■ János Breuer: "Arnold Schoenberg könyvtárának Bartók-kottái" (The Bartók Scores in Arnold Schoenberg's Library), *Muzsika,* XL, April 1997, pp. 6–9.

13 ■ Theodor W. Adorno: "Volksliedersammlungen", *Die Musik* XVII. Vol. 8.

14 ■ See Adorno's critique in *Zeitschrift für Musik,* Vol. 92, No.7/8.

15 ■ See Adorno's critique in *Der Anbruch,* vol. 11, No. 9/10.

16 ■ Adorno: *Philosophie der neuen Musik.* Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1958.

17 ■ René Leibowitz: "Béla Bartók ou la possibilité de compromis dans la musique contemporaine", *Les Temps Modernes,* Paris, October 1947.

18 ■ András Mihály: "Válasz egy Bartók-kritikára" (Response to a Critique of Bartók), *Új Zenei Szemle,* I, September 1950, pp. 49–56.

19 ■ Foreword by András Mihály in: *Bartók Béla levelei* (Az utolsó két év gyűjtése) (Béla Bartók's Letters: Collection from the last two years). ed. by János Demény. Budapest, 1951.

20 ■ *Borås Tidning,* 11 December, 1981.

21 ■ *Contrechamps: Ligeti–Kurtág.* Paris, Éditions l'Age d'homme, 1990, p. 6.

Bálint Sárosi

Hungarian Gypsy Music: Whose Heritage?

Two French authors have been making an attempt to pronounce judgement on an issue long since considered resolved and settled. Like Liszt almost a century and a half ago, they interpret literally the use of the term "Gypsy music" to describe folk-based Hungarian popular music, and regard the popular Hungarian musical idiom of the 19th and 20th centuries as the handiwork of the Gypsies. Before taking a look at the two studies, let us first examine whether there are any aspects of 19th-century Hungarian popular music which might be classified as part of a specifically Gypsy tradition.

The Hungarian instrumental dance music of the early 19th century—so-called *"verbunkos"* music—along with Hungarian popular songs (*"magyar nóta"* in Hungarian) and the *csárdás,* are referred to even by Hungarians themselves using one word, *cigányzene* (Gypsy music), if a Gypsy band happens to be playing them. Anyone familiar with Hungarian culture will need no explanation of the components of this term. *Cigányzene* or *cigány zene*—does it matter whether it is written as one word or as two? Translated into English or French, however, both of these variants can only be rendered in one way, using two words: "Gypsy music", or *"musique tsigane"*. In the last few decades we have come to know a great deal not only about *"cigány-zene"*, but also about *"cigány zene"*—in other words the Gypsies' own music—largely thanks to research done in Hungary and to the efforts of Gypsy folk groups operating in Hungary. Foreigners may perhaps wonder how it is possible for one ethnic group simultaneously to have two such distinct musical traditions in a country as small as Hungary. The latter happens to be expressly vocal music which bore no relation whatever to the 19th century romantic bourgeois thinking and feeling of Hungarian folksy music. The fact is, however, that a growing number of Gypsies have taken a liking to this Hungarian folksy music. This music—which is part of Hungarian culture—is generally thought of as their own musical idiom by Gypsies, in much the same way as most Gypsies in Hungary think of Hungarian as their native language. But the music played and liked by Gypsies—called Gypsy music—is only their music in the sense in which the Hungarian spoken by them is their language.

That part of Hungary's oral musical tradition which had been rendered suitable for consumption by the middle classes was

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considered by Liszt to be the invention of the Gypsies. He and his contemporaries, highly educated but unfamiliar with folk traditions, were ignorant of traditional Gypsy music; and if they had ever heard it, they certainly would not have regarded it as music. From what they noticed of the Gypsies, it would have been easy to imagine that every Gypsy went about with a fiddle under his arm. In reality, however, then and always, only a very small proportion of Gypsies was involved with music—and moreover, especially at that time, *not* with the music of their own people. In 1782, when the first census was taken in Hungary (on an area more than three times the present), there were 43,787 Gypsies on record, of whom 1582 were musicians, i.e. 3.6 per cent. (Nowadays the ratio is less than two per thousand, although it is also true to say that "Gypsy music" has been in sharp decline over the past fifty years.) The same period, the latter decades of the 18th century, saw the start of the era of *verbunkos* music, which was to continue into the middle of the 19th century and was the first great period of glory for the Gypsy musicians of Hungary. It was this glory which so enraptured Liszt and led him to write his *Hungarian Rhapsodies,* followed—as a kind of explanation of the Rhapsodies—by his book on "The Gypsies and their music in Hungary" (*Des Bohémiens et de leur musique en Hongrie,* Paris, 1859). According to generally familiar documentary evidence, the Hungarian national movement gave a great boost to Gypsy musicians. Even if there had been anything authentically Gypsy in their music prior to that time, from then on their success depended on strict conformity to the requirements of their Hungarian audience. It is inconceivable, even in jest, that Hungarians would have converted from Hungarian to Gypsy music precisely at the time of the national movement, at a time when people were particularly sensitive to ensuring that everything—language, dress, dance and also music—was traditionally Hungarian, while at the same time in line with current European taste. In his book Liszt nevertheless resolutely asserts the view that Hungarian music was brought (from where? one wonders) and wrought by the Gypsies. His views could hardly be the fruit of observation, since the people who assisted him, on his visits home, to collect the raw material relating to Hungary for his book, likewise knew very little about the mechanisms by which a musical tradition is formed. Liszt describes the Gypsy musicians as he wanted, in his romantic imagination, to see himself. His book to this day provides a model and a reference work for all those who want to give the Gypsies a wedding cake, rose-tinted picture of themselves.

The Hungarians were not ashamed to call their musical entertainers by their real name for all the world to hear. They felt no need to hide them behind a façade of "Hungarianness"; they trained them and tutored them, derived pleasure from their foreign tours and followed with keen interest their not always unambiguous successes abroad. They cursed their botch-ups, but they also—and the record bears witness primarily to this—admired the suavely flamboyant style of the best performers. They generously conferred the title "Gypsy music" even on music learnt, note for note, from a score, if it appeared on a "Gypsy" programme. Over the course of a century and a half the epithet "Gypsy" became imbued with respect within the profession, even among musicians who otherwise would not have taken kindly to being considered Gypsies on the street; it meant *musician* (or, as the famous Bihari was known in the first half of the 19th century, *Hungarian folk musician*). It is quite a different story in the case of other peoples where the recognized masters of musical

entertainment are likewise traditionally Gypsies. In the case of the Turks, the Greeks, the Albanians and the Romanians, the music played by the Gypsy musicians is called "Turkish", "Greek", "Albanian" or "Romanian" respectively. And this is entirely as it should be, unless one harbours the absurd notion of robbing all these different nations of their musical traditions and attributing as many types of music to the Gypsies alone. No one needs imports by instrumentalists to satisfy any need they may feel for traditional music. And in any case, where would they have found so many different types of music, each perfectly suited to the culture of the people in question? On the other hand, it is not uncommon to find the organization, i.e. the performance, of musical entertainment entrusted to alien itinerants. In such cases it is naturally not the employer who adapts but vice-versa. The instrumentalist adjusts and together with the locals, carries on whatever it is that they have devised and developed, in the manner dictated by them.

Throughout human history the occupation of entertainer, and thus also that of musical entertainer, has generally been regarded as a lowly one. The only people willing to engage in such an activity were poor people, living on the fringe of society and with little chance or expectation of gaining respect in society, capable of complying totally with the taste of the audience, indeed capable of complete self-abasement for the sake of earning a living. The host community has never been interested in whether or to what extent its musicians were authentically foreign; it just wants the music to reflect faithfully the customary or required attitudes. In Miklós Markó's album of Gypsy musicians (1896 and 1927 respectively) one finds only Hungarian gentlemen. In their dress and their demeanour, they represent the social classes they serve, i.e., the Hungarian gentry and middle classes. The one-time alien itinerants have themselves become firmly-rooted "locals".

To be able to assess properly the music played by them—particularly if one takes into account the role of rural Gypsy musicians too—it is essential to have a thorough understanding of the whole of the Hungarian musical tradition, both written and unwritten, since that is the context in which it emerged and developed. At the same time, it is not possible to identify any single element of this music which might produce the conclusion that it is of specifically Gypsy origin. The repertoire and style of rural musicians is closely tied to local (and mainly vocal) traditions and customs. Among the town musicians—the exponents of "Gypsy music"—on the other hand, the main quality criterion from the middle of the 19th century onwards has been the number of excerpts from opera, operetta and other popular pieces of international music learnt from a score. *Verbunkos* music, which characterized their first period of widespread success and became the fashionable instrumental music of the early 19th century, developed in the late18th and early 19th centuries out of traditional Hungarian dance music, which had been played mostly by non-Gypsies (shepherds, peasants and wandering musicians of various ethnic origin) and principally on the bagpipes. This music must originally have been of a kind known and liked by rural folk, since the *verbunkos* dances (from the German *Werbung* = recruiting) were organized primarily to entice village lads to the colours. *Verbunkos* music went out of fashion in the second half of the 19th century; at its demise sheet music was needed to revive the few tunes which are still played now and then by musicians today.

The folk-based popular music—the Hungarian *nóta* (slow lyrical air) and the *csárdás*—the music of the masses

considered to be the typical Hungarian musical idiom from the middle of the 19th century—was, like the earlier *verbunkos* music, also mainly the work of Hungarian amateurs. From the moment it was conceived, it also quite naturally became part of the Gypsy musicians' repertoire. It is this musical repertoire which the world nowadays knows as "Gypsy music" in a more literal sense. Among the many dozen of composers there were of course a few Gypsy musicians—after all, they regard this style of music as their own. No-one would deny that János Bihari (1764–1827), the famous *verbunkos* composer, or Pista Dankó (1858–1903) were Gypsy musicians; but anyone who is familiar with their work knows—as they themselves knew—that it was not *Gypsy* music they were composing, but *verbunkos* music in the case of the former and, in that of the latter, the *nóta,* i.e. Hungarian popular song.

Alain Antonietto's ambitious-sounding article appeared in issue 1/1994, a special issue on music, of *Études Tsiganes,* an academic journal published twice yearly in Paris covering issues relating to Gypsies. The title of the article is "The History of Central European Instrumental Gypsy Music". Antonietto has published articles relating to Hungarian Gypsy music on a number of occasions in earlier issues of *Études Tsiganes* (1985, 1986 and 1987). When the aforementioned issue of *Études Tsiganes* fell into my hands, it occurred to me that we in "Central Europe" would not dare to attempt the task of producing a summary of such ambitious scope and significance. Let us therefore examine this bold piece of work which, incidentally, contains no notes or bibliographical references; it might nevertheless (given the benefit of the doubt) have been very intelligent and illuminating.

Illuminating it certainly is. In it, all in one heap, one can find every absurd notion about Gypsies and Gypsy musicians that uncritical laymen with romantic longings have managed to think up over the course of the past century and a half. The title of the study promises Central Europe, but apart from one allegedly Slovak Gypsy bandleader, only Hungarians and Romanians are mentioned, and only to the degree that they have become famous in western Europe—in other words, the article deals mainly with Hungarians. The alleged Slovak bandleader lived in a Slovak town by the name of "Lupka" and was called "Jozko Pito"—perhaps somebody knows how to interpret at least one of these names, I, for my part, have failed. On the other hand, there is sure to be no one who has heard of a Transylvanian boyar of around 1558 by the name of Mircea Vodă, who was an admirer of the Gypsies. Although there was indeed a Mircea Vodă, he could not have been a Transylvanian boyar around the middle of the 16th century for the simple reason that he died more than a centrury earlier—and moreover, he was no Transylvanian boyar (because in Transylvania there were no boyars), but a Wallachian Romanian voivode. The Hungarian nobleman, György Zrínyi, who captured a Gypsy cimbalom-player from the Turks, although not mentioned by name, is likewise made out to be a boyar. Antonietto knows a great many details relating to Hungary and Romania, but very superficially, and misunderstands the majority of these with complete impartiality—as well as reiterating without question earlier misunderstandings made by others. He throws all these undigested details into a hat, shakes them up and then lays them out before us. The resulting mixture is what he calls the history of Central European instrumental Gypsy music. The only purpose to which he puts this mal-

leable version of history is to show that since time immemorial all music played on instruments, by either of these two peoples, has obviously belonged to the Gypsies. He does however know—after all, it is fairly common knowledge nowadays—that the first Gypsies could only have made their appearance in Hungary towards the end of the 14th century at the earliest; the earliest records we have of Gypsy musicians, and early records in general are few and far between, date from the late 15th century. But this does not seem to deter him from placing Gypsy musicians in the court of King Andrew II (1176–1235), having the military exploits of King Matthias (1458–1490) extolled in song by Gypsy minstrels, or having Louis II (1516–1526) carouse away what was in the royal treasury with Gypsy musicians before falling in the Battle of Mohács. He includes among Gypsy musicians the likes of the 16th-century Hungarian student Imre Cimbalmos (otherwise known by his Latin name, *Emericus literatus Cymbalista*), and the outstanding 20th-century songwriter and nobleman, Árpád Balázs. The latter he even endows with a famous Gypsy bandleader as a father, in the shape of the well-known 19th-century bandleader Kálmán Balázs. As we saw from the example of Mircea, mentioned above, the author is just as cavalier in his treatment of Romanian history. For example, he makes the great Romanian Gypsy bandleader of the 19th century, Barbu Lautaru, the inspiration for Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsodies*.

Bartók, Kodály and the famous Romanian student of folk music, Brăiloiu, are accused of nationalism by Antonietto because they do not attribute the instrumental music of their respective nations to the Gypsies and claim that peasant music is of higher value than the more superficial, folksy bourgeois music which gave greater scope to Gypsy musicians. He reels off a list of quotations by famous and not-so-famous personages in praise of Gypsy bandleaders—praise from people whose only experience of Gypsy bands would have been the one or two good ones they might have heard at an international fair in Paris, or in an elegant restaurant in Budapest—and proceeds to draw the conclusion that the Gypsy musicians created this music through reverie and improvisation, as he puts it, in the "steppes of the Hungarian Puszta" and made it their gift to the non-musical world. Well, while he may not have understood the relevant literature on the subject, he clearly did not even take the trouble to inform himself as regards the procedures relating to unwritten, improvised music. If only he had asked just one Gypsy musician what is behind the music that he plays, he could easily have found out that the virtuosity which is indeed often deserving of admiration did not simply alight on the Gypsy musician of its own accord in the middle of the Puszta. Even if he was born with vast talent, he had to study and work very hard to become a virtuoso. As for the question of the type of music and the level of virtuosity, that does not depend on the fact that he is a Gypsy—in this Gypsies and non-Gypsies are identical—but on the cultural environment in which he lives and works.

The other study, which is not only ambitious, but aims to cover the subject, was written and published in 1996. The author, Patrick Williams, paid a short visit to Hungary and subsequently wrote his work, *Les Tsiganes de Hongrie et leur musique* (The Gypsies of Hungary and their Music, Paris: Cité de la Musique/Actes Sud) over the course of a few weeks.

Exacly half of this short, 144-page book deals with "Gypsy music"; the other half is entitled "Le chant des Rom"—The songs of the Roma. Even the manner in which

the book has been divided implies that the two are judged equal and form an equal part of Gypsy culture. The blurb on the cover says as much. I quote:

> What do the Gypsy violinist playing in a Budapest restaurant and the songs of a Gypsy community living in deepest rural Hungary have in common? Whose are the melodies and rhythms which so seduced Liszt and Brahms?
>
> This book shows that there is not one but several types of Gypsy music in Hungary, linked to two large Gypsy communities with very different forms of musical expression: the instrumental music of the Romungro Gypsies, an amalgam of Hungarian national feeling and Gypsy sentimentality (the famous *Rákóczi March* could be regarded as emblematic of this kind of music), and the songs of the Vlach Gypsies, which reflect life in their community.

Arguing with shrewd sophistry, hovering on wings of literary affectation over hazily presented facts, the author says basically the same in the 72 pages devoted to the subject. His discussion is modelled on Liszt's book. Indeed he quotes Liszt so extensively and with such unerring feel that if it were Liszt's errors one wanted to study, one would find them all here together. Clearly this is not the place for facts, such as one finds in more recent literature on the subject. And if there are some facts which cannot be avoided, with a little ingenuity they can always be squeezed to fit the mould one already has to hand. For the sake of appearing to be objective, Williams even makes several references to my book, *Gypsy Music (*Corvina Press, 1978), although never on any point of substance. If he had really looked closely, however, he would have found that we disagree on a number of fundamental issues and he could at least have attempted to refute my views. Any issues which might have warranted discussion by him, are, however, simply disregarded. A typical detail is the Gypsy grievance he attaches to the person of Panna Czinka, whose contemporaries, according to him, considered her "ugly" just because her skin was dark. In my book—if he did indeed read it—I quote almost verbatim from the original document relating to this, dated 1795, and according to which Panna Czinka, "was not beautiful" because of her extremely dark and pockmarked skin and her goitre, but her audience loved her anyway because of her amiable manner. Enthusiastic posterity has nevertheless compensated Panna Czinka generously for her lack of beauty in real life: she is referred to as the "beautiful Gypsy woman..." and for some this becomes the clear truth of the matter. Two illustrations relating to Panna Czinka are called into service in the book to persuade the reader. One of them depicts a beautiful young woman playing the violin to a group of noblemen with her band, (the artist, the ardently patriotic Hungarian, Imre Greguss, obviously did not know that there was no clarinettist in the band of the "beautiful Gypsy woman..."). The other portrayal of Panna Czinka is a piece of pure fantasy in the trashy romantic style full of dashing hussars and sabres and pipes, with an arbitrary birth date—1711—in one corner. An author so receptive to kitsch could not fail to mention the heart-rending, alleged custom of the Gypsy violinist Ede Reményi to leave the elegant world of the salons and return to the company of his Gypsy brethren from time to time to relax and play their "wild" music together—because "professional Gypsy musicians have one kind of music for outsiders and another kind of music for themselves". (In return for this astonishing piece of information we can let Williams in on the fact that Ede Reményi—or, as he was known earlier, Hoffmann—was not in fact Gypsy, nor did he learn the art of violin-playing in the Puszta.)

Williams takes his cue from Liszt in matters of taste as well. This is obviously the explanation why he accords second place to the Gypsies' own music. The blurb barely mentions it. He writes fine words about the role of Gypsy folk music and its performance but there is no analytical description. The latter would make it obvious that this purely vocal music, accompanied at most by improvised rhythm instruments (in recent years also by guitars) lacks weight if measured by Liszt's standards.

Of the innumerable errors into which this book falls, most of which have long been clarified in the literature on the subject, the most astonishing relates to the "affinity" between Hungarians and Gypsies. Williams kindly reminds us that both peoples came from the East. We have for example the *Rákóczi March,* enjoyed by Hungarian audiences—and therefore gladly played by Gypsy musicians. Its "Gypsy-style" melody, an augmented second followed by a half-step, which is similar to a Phrygian cadence, would in fact indicate an "affinity" among all peoples between Hungary and Afghanistan. This one broad type of melody, used for church singing as well as for common folk tunes, originated among Hungarian peasants. Bihari too played a version—his contemporaries noted their admiration, but did not consider it sufficiently original to write it down, as they did with the much less significant, but more original Bihari melodies. The definitive versions recognized by everyone and with which everyone nowadays is happy are those of Liszt and, particularly, of Berlioz. Or we have Brahms' *Hungarian Dances,* likewise mentioned above. The majority of the original melodies on which these are based were composed (i.e., written!) in the 1850s and 1860s. We know who the original composers were: Ignác Bognár, Miska Borzó, Béni Egressy, Ignác Frank, Béla Kéler, N. Mérty, Adolf Nittinger, Kálmán Simonffy, Elemér Szentirmay, Mór Windt. There is not one Gypsy among them. So how can this nevertheless be peculiarly Gypsy music?—someone like myself, a narrow-minded "specialist", might ask. Of course it cannot be, because any self-respecting Gypsy musician likes to play Brahms' *Hungarian Dances* strictly true to the score.

We should also mention those rhythms which are only played by Hungarian Gypsy musicians, and of which Williams, like Liszt, is so enraptured. However, also just like Liszt, he omits to give us a concrete example. What else should be mentioned here? Other elements/aspects of virtuoso playing on a musical instrument? The high level of skill required to master the art of the musical entertainer? These qualities do not belong to the Gypsies, but to Gypsy musicians, who may consider themselves Romungro or any other type of Gypsy in origin, but who have all undertaken as professionals to serve Hungarian culture. What would they do with the part of Hungarian culture which is theirs, if they claimed their rightful due? Do Williams and company have any ideas? Or perhaps they feel that Gypsy *musicians* have not received enough recognition in Hungary during the past century and a half? They can take it from me that their recognition has been much, much greater than is imagined in Paris.

It seems that these idiosyncratic views from abroad nevertheless have some influence in Hungary. In the Hungarian daily *Magyar Hírlap* of October 3, 1995, I read a statement by the director of a Gypsy artists' ensemble (not Gypsy "band") in which he declared, "In my opinion, if music is played by Gypsies, then that is Gypsy music." That could be enlightening, if anybody could provide an acceptable explanation. The above two authors have not been successful in doing so. I, meanwhile, have visions of a utopian scene in which "Gypsies" are playing Bach, Beethoven, Bartók... ❧

Zoltán Farkas

The Redemption of Instrumental Folk Music

Bálint Sárosi: *A hangszeres magyar népzene* (Hungarian Instrumental Folk Music), Budapest, Püski, 1996. 264 pp.

"What has always attracted me have been long neglected topics, problems that appear insoluble, blank spots which musicologists accept as *donné* forever,"[1] begins one of Pál Péter Domokos' books. These words could well serve as Bálint Sárosi's epigraph. For Sárosi's chosen field is indeed one which older ethnomusicologists, including the very best in the profession, had deliberately avoided. Over the years, instrumental folk music was the Cinderella of Hungarian ethnomusicology. Although both Bartók and Kodály registered much instrumental music as well as folk songs, which they fully exploited in their own compositions, as ethnographers they were always wary of it. While the primacy of vocal music cannot be doubted in Hungarian folk music, and Sárosi demonstrates the reasons for this, expressly instrumental music did not really fit into the conceptions which Bartók's and Kodály's generation held on peasant traditions.

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Instrumental music was played by men whose bread and butter it was. Their music was not a spontaneous manifestation of the spirit but was performed for a consideration. The musicians also differed from the peasantry in both status and lifestyle. In the eyes of Bartók and Kodály the grave sin of these professionals—mostly Gypsies since the end of the 18th century—was that they served fashion and the entertainment of those who paid them, intruding—as they saw it—a decadent, worthless, more recent urban repertoire into authentic folk culture. This led to Kodály's summary judgement: "The ethnographical value of the Gypsy musician consists in what he knows over and above the song and dance music of the towns."[2] Bartók, similarly, filtered off the peasant strata from the tunes played by Gypsy musicians and declared these to be solely worthy of study.

Processing this cleansed and selected repertoire met with numerous technical difficulties. For a start, getting the score of an ensemble, or even the playing of a single fiddle, down on paper with some degree of precision was much more complicated than noting down even the most involved vocal tune. Fortunately, the country was not short of highly skilled ethnomusicologists to carry this out but, compared to vocal melodies, fitting the treasury of instrumental music into a consistent and

logical classification proved to be extraordinarily difficult. Not even László Lajtha, a pioneer of this field, who turned field recordings of instrumental music into scores that go into microscopic details, was prepared to provide an analysis of his data or to clarify theoretical questions.

A new impetus was given by the post-Second-World-War study of Hungarian folk dance, for which a high standard was set by György Martin. At the same time, a start was made on systematic research into the historical sources of dance tunes, primarily by Pál Péter Domokos (18th century) and Ervin Major and Géza Pápp (*verbunkos*). Soon Bálint Sárosi himself put in an appearance. Looking back from 1997, it would appear that all his earlier work led up to the great summing up, to his *magnum opus,* this present book.

Research into instrumental folk music and into the instruments used for its performance were interdependent and Sárosi's own first works to achieve international acclaim concerned instruments. His book on Hungarian folk instruments was the first in a series of handbooks initiated by the International Council of Folk Music,[3] later to be reworked as a textbook on Hungarian folk instruments.[4] The late Benjámin Rajeczky, the doyen of Hungarian musicologists, praised the author "as an outstanding instrumentalist and collector, who discussed instrumental music and instruments, their function and their social context as well as their history, thereby providing thorough information on these neglected fields that was many-sided and comprehensive and which also went into a great deal of technical detail."[5] Sárosi's other major line of research concerned the instrumental performers, the Gypsies, who made up the majority of those professional musicians whose livelihood came from folk music. His *Gypsy Music*[6] relied on a wealth of historical sources and on sensitive sociological observations. He examines the role of Gypsy musicians, confronting myths based on no foundation with the facts.[7] In 1980 Sárosi selected three LPs worth of music from the instrumental tradition by making use of the documentary recordings of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.[8] In the eighties, he produced a great deal in periodical publications on folk musicians who made a living as performers and those who did not, on links between instrumental and vocal folk music and on the influence of instrumental folk music on Haydn and Kodály. In 1988 he edited and prepared for press an important collection of instrumental music by László Lajtha.[9]

A series of articles[10] on analysing and systematizing instrumental music has preceded his most recent book, which is a summary of individual research over several decades in a field uncovered both in or outside Hungary. Sárosi's conclusion is that the typology of vocal folk music cannot be applied to the instrumental repertoire: classificiation must follow from the instrumental music itself. Presenting the premises and methods for classification is an important—but not the only—novelty in the book. An immediacy which springs from the experience of field work, intimate familiarity with folk instruments, the presentation of the sociological background and of the environment within which folk instrumentalists live and work, as well as a sure hand in classification and the analysis of tunes, result in a work which poses just about every question that matters for the study of Hungarian instrumental folk music.

When considering a definitive book which aspires to be both theoretical and descriptive, we must first ask how the author defines the limits of his field. Where, for instance, should we draw the boundary between traditional peasant music and

folksy music-making in towns? According to Sárosi, we must "think in terms of the tradition as a whole, even if we only pass judgement on instrumental folk music in the strict sense of the term." The first part of the book (The Musician and His Public) surveys the social status of player-performers, including Gypsy musicians in towns. A colourful music making scene is brought to life in these chapters, and we can only be grateful that the author has cast his net wide. In discussing the music as such, however, (The Stock of Tunes and Style) Sárosi is concerned with peasant music in the narrow sense, as defined by Bartók and Kodály. It is in these chapters that he discusses and classifies the tunes listed in the Compendium of Examples. Another question that could not be dodged is that of the borderline between vocal and instrumental music. Here too Sárosi's decision derives from the nature of the material. Music of vocal origin syllabized as if sung and played by amateur instrumentalists does not belong to the context of this book, tunes whistled, hummed or sung, however, in keeping with an instrumental style, that is sung performances that mimic instruments fall, according to their function and musical characteristics, within the purview of the book. The third major unit (Melodic Draft and the Finished Piece), looks into the ways in which musical units dissected for the purposes of classification, function when performed as large form. It is here that numerous procedures (improvisation, tune extension, accompaniment, embellishments, harmonization, &c.) are described, which did not fit into the stylistic classification of tunes but which are nevertheless an organic part of the performed reality of instrumental folk music. The Compendium of Musical Examples which accounts for around half the book (almost 800 items), presents tunes in a "notation much like slides prepared for the microscope" and not as comprehensive scholarly scores. The essential elements thus highlighted, the Compendium serves to illustrate and support the author's line of thought. The Appendix to the Compendium, however, contains some complete pieces, including the complete scores for all the the members in the performing ensemble. A piece implies the cycle as a whole since, as Sárosi sees it, instrumental music must be examined as large form *(Grossform)*. The Compendium is made accessible by carefully prepared indexes: a list of sources, a toponym index, an index according to function and list of cadences.

The first chapter (What Kind of Man Makes Music for a Living?) of the first part (The Musician and his Public) argues—spanning great distances in space and time—that those who made music for a consideration were always outsiders in relation to the public whom they served. They were not only aliens but also subject to taboos of sorts and even regarded as "unclean". Sárosi cites numerous superstitions connected with musicians to make this point. He describes other trades and crafts Gypsy musicians had to engage in to eke out their income, and at this point recounts the instruments favoured by non-Gypsy peasants. The chapter One Performer, Several Performers; Peasant Player—Gypsy Player discusses the distribution of various instruments, the periods when they flourished and declined, fashions in instruments and the way the combinations altered, all the way from the *fiddle–gardon* (a violoncello used as a percussion instrument) duo, through the "classical" quartet (fiddle, second fiddle, double bass, *cimbalom*) to the hugely enlarged Gypsy orchestras of the 19th and 20th centuries. He dates the switch from bagpipe music, which earlier had the definitive role, to the fiddles which took over from it. He uses a wealth of sources, including literary, but

also 16th- and 17th-century political broadsheets, early Hungarian memoirs, the accounts of English travellers, and, of course, the entire literature of the subject.

Scholarly works seldom offer catharsis but Sárosi's book is one of the rare exceptions. The chapter which takes my particular fancy is the one entitled Entertainer and Plaything. This is not only sociology of music at its best but displays a fine sensibility, an understanding not only of musicians ready to provide anything that was wanted if the price was right,and even how the instinct to dominate got the upper hand in those who paid for the tune that diverted them. Stories of practical jokes played, for instance that of the fiddler let down into the well, so that his fright would give an extra edge to his bitter-sweet playing of a lamenting song, tell us much about the social psychology of a by-gone age. Nor does he leave out tales of the luxuries Gypsy musicians indulged in, of the adulation some of them received, and of the rivalry between stars of the cafés, their competitions, or what were called "duels of the strings". Sárosi's narrative is backed by facts and figures, and by more than thirty well-chosen photographs.

The chapter Gypsy Musicians—Hungarian Traditions has most to say about an old and stubbornly surviving misapprehension, which not-so-well informed authors abroad cherish. Sárosi repeatedly refers to this errror which, lately, has here and there again raised its ugly head even in ethnomusicological writings.[11] Some people consider the music played by Gypsy musicians over the past two centuries to be Gypsy music. In fact it is the Hungarian popular art music of its time, the so called *"nóta"*. Sárosi points to the paradox that what some people abroad, who ought to know better, stubbornly describe as Gypsy music "could in fact be taken to be the most nationally Hungarian part of the Hungarian music tradition, since it was produced by the Hungarian national movement." Sárosi provides an outline history of the Gypsies in Hungary, and historical data concerning Gypsy musicians as further evidence. These are data on the presence of Gypsies in Hungary (as in other countries in Europe) going back to the fifteenthth century, but Gypsy musicians are really only in evidence since the eighteenth. Magyarized Gypsy musicians were prominent in the renewal of the musical idiom which took place in Hungary around the year 1800. They, however, did not create this new repertoire, they merely played it. How Were the Musicians Trained, the closing chapter of the first part, demonstrates in detail that Gypsy musicians were indeed highly trained and that some Gypsy musicians were also teachers.

While what Sárosi has to say in the way of the sociology of music and of history is of general interest, the middle section, (Stock of Tunes and Style) is addressed to musicologists. He makes a number of methodological points of basic importance which are a distillation of his long experience in the field. He draws attention to the limitations in using methods developed in the study of vocal music when dealing with the more heterogeneous instrumental material, stressing that the definition of criteria for a typology will have to be carried out later. Sárosi establishes his own signposts to serve as a guide in the instrumental repertoire. His approach to tune kinship, styles and types is via twin bars, the smallest recognizable units. This prompts him to divide the repertoire into three large groups: a twin-bar layer, pairs of lines, and the strophic material.

This is not the place for a summing up of all the contributions to musicology which this book contains. There is much which offers food for thought and which is

controversial. Systematic adherence to the logic of classification sometimes places tunes that belong together in separate categories, although Sárosi refers to the existing kinship in every case. I personally would like to see the same tunes published in another classification as well, in which pairs of lines and strophes that belong together would appear next to each other, but limitations on space make, I know, such a dual arrangement impossible in a work of this sort. Though Sárosi repeatedly draws attention to the temporary nature of his classification, the Compendium of Musical Examples does indeed provide a genuine picture of the tunes and their interrelations. Ethnomusicologists are provided with an extensive base—and inspiration—for further research. Historians of music will be particularly interested in references to the "Hungarian" elements in Haydn's music. (I doubt if there is more on this subject anywhere else.) Sárosi's discussion of terminological questions is a model of its kind. He deals in detail with the meanings of terms current in Hungary—such as *aprája, diminutio,* division, *figura, cifra* and their equivalents abroad. He never loses sight of the function of the tunes, something that is an even more important *point d'appui* for instrumental than for vocal music. He pays attention to the notion of a variant and notes that "unfortunately, we know hardly anything about the criteria on the basis of which performers of traditional music think of a tune as identical with another or different from it." This is a field, however, where many younger ethnomusicologists have already had important things to say.[12]

The early appearance of this book in English, German and other languages is highly desirable. *Hungarian Instrumental Folk Music* is a major step in the exploration of a long neglected field. ❧

NOTES

1 ■ Pál Péter Domokos: *Hangszeres magyar tánczene a XVIII. században* (Hungarian Instrumental Dance Music in the 18th century), Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1978.

2 ■ Zoltán Kodály: *A magyar népzene* (Hungarian Folk Music), (First Ed.: 1937), Budapest, Zeneműkiadó, 1976, in English: *Folk Music of Hungary,* New York, The Macmillan Company, 1960, p. 111.

3 ■ Bálint Sárosi: *Die Volksmusikinstrumente Ungarns. Handbuch der europäischen Volksmusikinstrumente,* Serie I, Band 1., Institut für deutsche Volkskunde Berlin, Leipzig, VEB Deutscher Verlag für Musik, Stockholm, Musikhistorisches Museum, 1967, 147 pp.

4 ■ Bálint Sárosi: *Magyar népi hangszerek.* (Hungarian Folk Instruments), Budapest, Tankönyvkiadó, 1973, 116 pp.

5 ■ Benjamin Rajeczky: in the Preface to the above, p. 5.

6 ■ Bálint Sárosi: *Gypsy Music,* Budapest, Corvina, 1978.

7 ■ For example, erroneous statements appeared in Liszt's scandalous 1859 book on Gypsy music, *(Des bohémiens et de leur musque en Hongrie).*

8 ■ *Hungarian Instrumental Folk Music from the Collection of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.* Ed. by Bálint Sárosi. Budapest, Hungaroton LPX 18045–47, 1980.

9 ■ László Lajtha: *Instrumental Music From Western Hungary. From the Repertoire of an Urban Gypsy Band. Studies in Central and Eastern European Music, 3.* Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1988.

10 ■ "A hangszeres magyar népi dallam" (Hungarian Instrumental Folk Tune) In: *Magyar Zene, 1987:* 335–378; *1988:* 28–42, 197–218, 237–2550, 351–378; *1989:* 115–135, 250–274; *1991:* 266–283, 374–385; *1992:* 56–65, 241–256 pp.

11 ■ Bálint Sárosi: "Párizsi ítélet: a magyar népies zene a cigányoké". (Judgement of Paris: Hungarian popular music belongs to the Gypsies), a sharp critique of the pseudo-scientific articles of Alain Antonietto and Patrick Williams. In: *Muzsika,* 1997, March, 3–6 pp. For an English version of this, see pp. 133–139 in the present issue of *The Hungarian Quarterly.*

12 ■ For example, István Pávai of the Budapest Museum of Ethnology and the Institute for Musicology has much of interest to say on what folk musicians think about their own music.

Tamás Koltai

The Tragedies of Man

Imre Madách: *Az ember tragédiája* (The Tragedy of Man) • Paul Foster: *Tom Paine;* Kornél Hamvai: *Körvadászat* (The Battue) • *Matiné*

Despite Steiner's proclamation that tragedy is dead, playwrights do write plays and theatres do perform them. The great classic tragedies are still in the repertoire; leading directors seek in them valid formulations on the mystery of human existence independent of any given time.

The classic of the Hungarian theatre is Imre Madách's *Az ember tragédiája* (The Tragedy of Man). Best described as a dramatic poem, it has always been the subject of scholarly, ideological and political debate, as well as being constantly in the repertoire, except for a number of years during the communist dictatorship. Since its first performance in 1883 it has received many thousands of performances in Hungary, it has been translated into virtually all European languages and produced in several countries, despite the difficulties its thinking caused or the complexities of the staging. In August this year it was put on at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, in Iain MacLeod's English translation, with a mixed cast of British and Hungarian actors and directed by John Carnegie.

Madách finished the final version of *The Tragedy* in 1860. After disappointments in both his private and public life, at the age of 37 and in financial difficulties, he withdrew to his country estate. He could not realistically expect to win literary recognition for his work, let alone to see it produced on the stage. A full year later, as a newly elected member of the Diet, he took the manuscript with him to Buda and sent it to János Arany, the great poet, who was well known for his Shakespeare translations (his translations of *Hamlet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are still unrivalled). Arany first saw a poor *Faust* imitation in *The Tragedy* (as it is always referred to in Hungary). Later Arany revised his opinion and even offered Madách help with improvements in some lines he had thought were infelicitous, which affected about one tenth of a work that is approximately four thousand lines in length.

The disparaging comparison to *Faust* was to crop up again in German criticism in the 1930s and 40s. It stems from the fact that the first and last scenes of the play, which frame the story, are set in Heaven and the plot starts with an agreement made between God (The Lord) and Satan (Lucifer). In Madách's work, the subject of the agreement are two trees in

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Paradise—the Trees of Eternal Life and Knowledge—which Lucifer demands from the Lord as his due for his role in the Creation. Lucifer is presented here as a rebel against despotism, making him closer to Lucifer in Byron's *Cain* rather than to Goethe's Mephistopheles. Once in possession of the accursed and forbidden trees, and outside Paradise, Lucifer tries to gain control over Adam and Eve's souls and thereby destroy them. (The interpretation at this point has always been somewhat uncertain as to whether Lucifer intends to destroy Adam and Eve physically or to devise the annihilation of mankind.) Lucifer casts a spell on them in which, at their request, he leads them through the history of Mankind—with Adam appearing in the guise of historical personalities, such as a pharaoh in Egypt, Miltiades in Athens, Sergiolus in Rome, Tancred in Byzantium, Kepler in Prague, Danton in Paris, etc. As history progresses, Adam first enthusiastically embraces the ideas of each new age, only to become disappointed in them. By the time he reaches the present, Madách's age—which is summarized in the urban bustle of London, English capitalism in the second half of the 19th century—he is no more than a walk-on figure, a minor observer. Then comes the future—the uniformity of the Phalanstery offered by contemporary utopian socialists, a pre-Orwellian nightmare. It was this scene that caused the ban on the play between 1949 and 1954, the ideological grounding for which was being provided by one György Lukács. This is followed by a transcendental experience which overcomes gravity, a trip into space, and finally, the end of life on the Earth as the Sun cools and an encounter with the last degenerate human survivors. All these lead Adam, now awakened from his dream, to a decision to commit suicide, only to be frustrated by Nature's eternal trick: a new life has been conceived. Eve, his companion throughout the scenes in various guises, is with child. Adam submits to his family instinct. The Lord declares Himself victorious over Lucifer, yet He also gives Lucifer's sometimes usefully sceptical intellect a mandate alongside the family model of the threesome: they are to go together on the road assigned to them, with the motto "Man [...] have faith, and do your best!"

It is obvious that the idea and the dramatic conception are modern, even though the solution (or rather absolution) does not really follow from the logic of the plot and the historical pessimism that permeates the play. ("The ending Madách gave it is as if Shakespeare had at the last minute taken the sword from Hamlet's hand, in case princes coming after him learn the art of killing from him," a Hungarian poet said in the 60s.) The problems of *The Tragedy*'s conception, however, concern dramatic theory and philosophy and have not much to do with how it has fared on the stage. Strangely enough, the first commentators did not even consider the possibility of staging the *Tragedy* and viewed it as a dramatic poem. Its first peformance, in the Budapest National Theatre under the direction of its then manager Ede Paulay, took place 23 years after it was written, long after the author's death. Thus commenced the theatrical history of *The Tragedy,* and a history of ideological explication and manipulation and successive changes in style.

The first performance was conceived in the spirit of the Meiningen school, then dominant in Europe. After the turn of the century, however, the abstract, symbolic, mystery play, expressionist elements were given priority. Directors in general go to either of the extremes of a spectacular costume play or an ascetic philosophical play—a duality that produces the greatest dilemma of the work in production. It has

been performed on huge open-air stages and in tiny workshops; it was turned into a film, into a television play, a radio play and an opera. From the 70s onwards, the Christian-mythological interpretation of the framing scenes has been relegated to the background and the political content has been accentuated by the metacommunication made possible by the theatre. Lucifer has ceased to be an archetype of Evil; on the contrary, he is a friend, instructor and guide to a human couple vulnerable in the face of the omnipotence of the Lord; he is a dissident of sorts who urges citizens to think, be sovereign and rebel against a received world order which they have to accept unconditionally, in faith and with a compulsory devotion. Interestingly enough, this line of interpretation was initiated by a magnificent guest performance in Budapest by an Estonian company. It has proved a liberating influence, which has urged directors to ignore fossilized traditions and tackle the *Tragedy* freely in both the intellectual and the dramaturgical sense—much as Shakespeare's plays have for long been reinterpreted in keeping with the demands of every particular age.

With the 175th anniversary of Madách's birth due in January 1998, three Hungarian companies, one in and two outside Budapest, have recently put *The Tragedy* on their repertory. The National Theatre, on every previous occasion except for once before the war had done this in their principal theatre of the time, this time they used the Várszínház, their studio theatre. Thus all three productions are in relatively small theatres. This indicates a need for intimacy and a concentration of the intellectual content rather than a spectacle. It also indicates a certain skepticism on the part of the management as regards *The Tragedy*'s popularity with audiences; they seem to fear that audiences are bored by what is "required reading". This also reflects how times have changed—from the mid-50s onwards the *Tragedy* was for a long time a sure box-office hit.

The Budapest National Theatre production is beautiful and conventional. Some call it bad, I'd be more inclined to say it lacks character. The historical scenes are given as a shadow play behind a tulle curtain hanging in an arch; the plot trudges on in respectable boredom. Talented young actors and actresses appear in the crowd scenes, declining in pairs gracefully (as is customary) in the *danse macabre* of the London scene or rattling their tin bowls in the Phalanstery scene. Since there is no clear purpose, intellectual vistas remain unopened. Adam recites his lines as an enthusiastic neophyte amateur, Eve in her various guises offers minutely realistic depictions which have little to do with Adam. That noted veteran, Dezső Garas plays his customary theatrical self as Lucifer, a frustrated, destructive grudge who looks on sneering since he knows the outcome from the start, and gives signals to the other performers as if he were the director in an amateur production. At the very end when, on a divine injunction Adam and Eve repeat the enthusiastic words they had uttered in the Paradise scene at the beginning of the play as though they had learnt nothing, he lifts his eyes upwards, shaking his head in disapproval: not quite right, colleagues. And this is the most original moment in István Iglódi's direction.

The director of the Debrecen production, György Lengyel, was still at secondary school when he first directed *The Tragedy* in 1954 with his schoolmates as actors in a production that won them considerable acclaim. He clings to *The Tragedy*'s interpretation as a mystery play. Mysteries have tended to be divested of their transcendental content. Lengyel

builds up his production from elements of the ritual theatre. The actors are clothed in uniform, neutral robes, with various complementary elements, primarily masks, serving to indicate the successive scenes, and what they perform is a mystery of existence juxtaposing man's "tiny life span", the conflict of the individual, in the dialectic of eternal annihilation and renewal, in eternal movement and eternal rotation. The Angelic Host and the Spirits praising the Lord are but masked idols with human qualities, and Adam and Eve too, their historical consciousness awakened, eventually stand in humankind's endless line of masks—which is also a dance of death. All through the actors criss-cross the auditorium, while some of the audience is seated amid the sets widened towards the rows of seats, on a "historical stand", in a *Lebensraum* shared with the actors.

Rather than unequal rivals in the myth of creation, Adam and Lucifer are the thesis and antithesis in a dialectic of ideas; Eve, instead of the eternally changing sexual servant, is a woman fired by a single passion, with an autonomous personality and many a hidden face. Lucifer is refined, a university lecturer who gives his dispassionate addresses; he has not much to do with the Creator and is not really bothered when, in the end, he is made part of the system. Adam does not seem to have acquired manners in Paradise, he could have been raised in the streets or in a reformatory. He is of solid build and has a pure, questing mind, strength and faith; one believes he longs for knowledge and is born to struggle.

The Miskolc production is the one which goes farthest in reinterpreting Madách and theirs is the most exciting too. Director András Schlanger does not concern himself with any (pseudo) reverence due to the classics. He takes the play out of the museum showcase and gives us Madách our contemporary. This version is about what "the struggle in itself", as Madách puts it, entails today. Adam lives in a prefabricated block of flats, with a bookshelf, a sofa, a kettle and a coffee cup around him—"these are mine", he could no doubt rightfully say, "outside Paradise" where he has to face everyday life. The Adam of the Miskolc production lives in the present. If he goes out, he sees "wild capitalism" in the street, with the bustle of beggars, money changers and vendors—Madách's present time in the London scene. The performance then starts in "London", with a closing-down sale of ideas and values. Body and spirit are for sale, entertainers at the fair parrot the romantic rhymed epitaphs of the original context; the Bible is turned into opera. The hosannas for the Lord in the opening scene are a put-on, the Lord with his cotton beard bellows out his report on the conclusion of Creation, and timid little angels place their hands on their ears when the devil as bogeyman growls. The scene in Paradise is a cheap puppet-show: Madách too refers here to the commercialization of Christian ideas. Lucifer steps from behind his own puppet figure and follows an intellectually fatigued Adam to home and puts him to sleep—only to wake him up to his fate.

The dream scenes, the anxieties of an intellectual, become really engaging from the medieval Prague scene onwards. This is only predictable for a modern Adam who in the earlier historical heroic roles merely recites his lessons as though taking part in some intensive course, and the director facilitates this by adding a few stylized motifs. However, Kepler's problem is already a personal and modern one—the plight of a scientist kept at bay by the powers that be and by financial exigency. The Danton of the French Revolution is a disillusioned revolutionary toing and froing with black

sarcasm between faith and cynicism—surrounded by flags with the holes cut out of their centre, a reference to the 1956 Hungarian Revolution. The sudden break in the London scene, which is started for a second time now in its proper chronological place, is a revelation—Adam wakes up to the sound of the kettle and rushes out, quite obviously with suicidal intention, into the same reality which had appeared in his nightmare, but not before reciting his soliloquy on free will that defies predestination. He then jumps into the gaping abyss. The next scene is set on the boundary between existence and non-existence in a surgical theatre rather than in Space. Adam is having visions in his coma and elects to die. The reply to his defiance—the Spirit of the Earth summoning him back—is heard in the voice of the doctor resuscitating him. The scenes in the Phalanstery and Space are dropped; one is not yet, the other is no longer topical.

Schlanger's interpretative attempt is justified in that he confronts us with the everyday existence of a rational man broken loose from the transcendental. The justification, however, for Adam's statement in the bustle of the present-day "London" scene to the effect that he is still alone in the world is questionable. But if we discard doctrinaire thinking and accept John Donne when he says that each man stands for mankind, then the suicide of an individual is the suicide of mankind on a small scale. The significance and novelty of the Miskolc production of the Tragedy lie precisely in the direct, personal touch offered to the contemporary viewer by an impetuous, raincoated Adam and a clever Lucifer cynically exaggerating his disillusioned observations.

The Miskolc production of *The Tragedy* has not received the acclaim due to its significance. Its director bitterly remarked that had it been in the Budapest Katona József Theatre or in the Kaposvár theatre the production would now be the talk of the theatre world. There is something in this—both the audiences and the profession tend to pay greater attention to theatres where the plays, whether classical or modern, are always confronted with present reality with a provocative, even "subversive" purpose.

And this is exactly what happened again to the Kaposvár production of *Tom Paine*. Paul Foster's play was originally a playful persiflage, with the figure of the 18th-century English thinker and revolutionary, a key figure in the birth of the United States, placed in the centre of an ironic group theatre, in order to confront the lofty ideals of the Enlightenment with everyday reality, primarily, of course, that of the 60s, the years of plexiglass and plastic, Coca Cola cans and Andy Warhol's pop art. The director, János Mohácsi, has naturally brought forward the sarcastic critique to our day. Though a good part of the original text fell victim to this far from tender shift, a series of occasionally brilliant improvisations are offered instead, and this is not far from the author's intentions. Nothing is naturalistic in the tiny studio theatre. Probably the funniest scene is the great crossing on a boat suspended like a swing on which the actors are packed on two decks—one for the aristocrats, one for the lower classes—only to show the absurdity of history with various verbal and visual jokes. While we laugh at the protagonist bumbling around, we never for a moment forget that what we see is, in a sense, a tragedy—about the destruction of the redeeming ideas of the past.

The recent past, however, is still with us and we have our reckoning to do with it. The Kaposvár company also produced a play about the 1956 Revolution. A compe-

tition was earlier held on the 40th anniversary of the uprising, to which all major contemporary Hungarian playwrights had been invited. It was a risky undertaking, for many of us still have vivid memories of the ceremonial protocol of incidental dramas. Such fears proved to be unfounded. The winner of the shared first prize, *Körvadászat* (The Battue) by 28-year-old Kornél Hamvai, who already has a successful first novel behind him, is a bizarre allegory on how in the 50s Communist Party apparatchiks systematically decimated game—as well as one another. If only because of his age, Hamvai rightfully feels himself relieved of the obligations of either sober documentation or emotional anniversary solemnity. Instead he surveys the fathers' acts in the past fifty years with the shocked incredulity that those producing absurdity with their lives deserve.

The idyll of the surface male bonding of the communist county leadership is clouded over in the play by the political trials of the late 40s. The apparatchiks who till then had enjoyed their power at peaceful battues start, at the instructions of the state security chief, shooting at one another. Telescoping the showcase trials of the Rajk type—the systematic decimation of cadres started with the conviction and execution of Interior Minister László Rajk—into the great autumn shoots is not without some philosophical and historical piquancy. Yet this is sarcasm rather than cynicism. At the climax of the play, when all the victims of this unending shoot—hare, deer, boar, as well as those who have fallen in political trials or without any trial—are laid out on a common bier, he commemorates the most successful popular rite, an attempt at atonement, in the past forty years—the Great Hungarian Reburial. (One of the events leading to the 1956 Revolution was the ceremonial reburial of the executed Rajk two weeks before its outbreak. The executed Prime Minister of the Revolution, Imre Nagy, was reburied in 1989. The earthly remains of Regent Miklós Horthy were brought home and reburied with semi-official pomp; as were those of the last Prince Primate, Cardinal Mindszenty—and this list is by no means complete.)

The basic situation is allegorical, on which are built a number of not easily compatible episodes involving meticulous realism, stand-up comedy and the theatre of the absurd. In their content they are all equally emphatic—one sketch has wives and lovers flirting around within the political clan according to the dominant wind and in the final analysis they counterbalance one another. For its thought and passion, density of metaphor and theatricality, *The Battue* is not just a promising first play by a youthful writer; it is a mature work.

László Babarczy is sober, ironic and rational enough to direct the piece with substantial historical and theatrical experience. The key to his production lies in the proportionate doses of objective judgment and ironic distancing, at certain moments the mixture of the two, which results in "painful semi-close-ups", at least to the eyewitnesses of the original version of events. The designer has put a black astrological chart, imitative of numerological systems, over the stage, as though the story is taking place under the aegis of an unpredictable occultism. There is something to it too, for the ideological shoot had a degree of irrationality in it, indicated somewhat maliciously by the events being started by a not quite unambiguous reading by a palmist. All these tragic-grotesque episodes are crowned by the bizarre allegory of the great day of the burial when the catch is laid out for public view to the sounds of solemn funeral music.

It so happened that when I saw the play schoolchildren were present too. They

laughed at the scene—today's teenagers find it difficult to take the blood sports of the past fifty years seriously.

A special ritualistic evocation of the past is to be seen in the avant-garde production played in the cellar of an old house in central Budapest before an audience of ten to fifteen at a time, no admittance fee charged. The performers of *Matiné* are a couple, Miklós B. Székely and Lili Monori, who made their name in a number of Hungarian films and alternative theatrical productions, and their 15-year-old daughter and a duck. The cellar is a labyrinth of adjacent corridors, brick walls, tubes, wires and bright lights hung on hooks. The audience is received with ear-splitting music, the marching song of the World Federation of Working Youth, first in Hungarian, then in Russian and German. The actors wear the communist youth uniform of white shirt, blue skirt or shorts and red tie, and fly the duck, also in a red tie, as some symbolic "pigeon of peace". We see unsmiling, haggard and apathetic adults whose movements are compulsive, awkward, walking with an indifferent daughter and a duck in a basket. The duck flaps its wings, toddles on stunted feet, then flops down, its head is pressed into a bowl with feed and water in it.

Lili Monori's mother was in fact run over by a train when she tried to shoo a duck off the rails. The accident is repeated here with a model train and a photograph. The photo is buried in a matchbox, then the mother's figure is ritualistically re-created from pieces of clothing and a letter written to her daughter. Another ritualistic act is the eating of a grilled chicken clad in the communist youth uniform. A short version of the text of Samuel Beckett's *Endgame* lifts the social end-situation into the transcendental sphere—the barren, hopeless situation of "the last couple" suddenly becomes familiar, personal, strangely quasi-realistic. At the end the three of them turn their bodies, their physical strength to labour, ploughing the land while the marching song blares on.

As the audience emerges from the cellar into the street, they are met by disco music blasting from the upper floor. The contrast between tragedy and the superficialities of existence appears too keen. ❧

Graham Petrie

Hungarian Silent Cinema Rediscovered

A total of 460 films were made in Hungary during the silent period; only 33—some in fragmentary form of only a few minutes in length—are known to survive today. Depressing as this figure sounds, it is at least an improvement on the situation as recently as fifteen years ago, when none of the 24 films that Sándor Korda (later Alexander Korda) made in Hungary was thought to exist any longer, and the noted Hungarian film historian István Nemeskürty could state that only a few scenes from one of the 38 (or, by some counts, 47) Hungarian films of Mihály Kertész (later Michael Curtiz) still remained. The total production of other noted directors of the period, such as Alfred Deésy, Márton Garas and Béla Balogh (not to be confused with the film theoretician and scriptwriter Béla Balázs) was likewise believed to have entirely disappeared. Fortunately, supposedly lost films are constantly being discovered all over the world and restoration progammes by the major film archives are making them available once again in something close to their previous splendour in newly struck prints that often recreate even the tinting and toning of the originals.

A major venue for the screening of these restorations is the Pordenone Silent Film Festival, held each October in a small town in north-east Italy, and attended by film lovers, critics, historians, and archivists from all over the world—as well as by a healthy segment of the local population. This year one of the Festival's themes was "Magyar Dynamism", which involved the screening of six newly restored features (two by Deésy, three by Balogh and one by Korda), together with a short film by Kertész, fragments of some other films, and some newsreels of the period. Small as this sampling is, it helps to illuminate the overall development of the early, and very lively, Hungarian cinema and to provide some interesting comparisons with the current situation, where once again Hungarian filmmakers find themselves forced to compete in a world market deprived of the security provided by the state-supported system of the Communist period.

The most prolific period for the silent Hungarian cinema was pre-1920; after that political censorship and the emigration of

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the three most talented directors of the time—Korda, Kertész and Pál (later Paul) Fejos—ensured that the overall quality was largely mediocre. Influenced by the French, Danish and German cinema of the era, as well as that of America, most filmmakers of the pre-1920 period attempted to compete in the European market with lavish productions with elaborate sets and costumes, dealing with middle class or aristocratic life and its—usually romantic—problems. Yet, in several films, an undercurrent of social and political protest is also evident, suggesting that the notable achievements of Hungarian cinema in the 1960s and 1970s were rooted in a national tradition and were not simply the result of the specific political circumstances of the Communist era.

The post-Second World War Communist government had of course its abortive predecessor in the Republic of Councils in mid-1919, during which time the Hungarian film industry was briefly nationalized. Most of the prominent figures in the film industry—including the later arch-capitalist Korda, as well as Kertész and the actor Béla Lugosi—seem to have offered the revolutionary government enthusiastic support, and as many as 31 films appeared during its four-month rule. Some of these had, of course, already been in pre-production and not all of them were filled with the revolutionary fervour of one of the only two known to survive today, Mihály Kertész's 12-minute long *My Brother is Coming* (Jön az öcsém), but it seems clear that many filmmakers, when given the opportunity, were concerned with something more than mere entertainment or financial profit.

My Brother is Coming, Kertész's last Hungarian film, is based on a revolutionary poem by Antal Farkas, whose words appear on the screen rhythmically intercut with the images of the hero returning from political exile and imprisonment, seen at first as an individual waving a huge red flag and finally being joined by an ever-growing crowd as he nears home and is reunited with his family before giving a speech to a procession assembled in the street outside. Although written text and images share roughly equal time on screen, the film is undeniably effective and some images (such as a crowd pouring down a hillside) seem to anticipate later works, such as Miklós Jancsó's *Red Psalm.*

Given the often random nature of the process that determines which films from the silent period survive and which do not, it is dangerous to draw conclusions concerning popularity or artistic merit from the limited amount of evidence available. Two of the feature length films shown at Pordenone were made by the prolific Alfred Deésy, to whose name the adjective "mediocre" is invariably attached by critics, yet the films themselves are not without interest and, at the very least, represent what seems to have been one of the major trends of the period.

Aphrodite (Aphrodite, 1918) has very little that is specifically "Hungarian" about it—not even in the setting, which is largely anonymous in the first half of the film and then becomes the Dalmatian coast for most of the remainder. The location shooting is impressive and the interior sets at the beginning of the film are suitably lavish and larger than life-size. But the acting is often overly theatrical, even for the period, and moments of emotional crisis (which occur with almost predictable regularity throughout the film) are invariably exaggerated through gesture and movement. The extraordinarily complicated plot is spread over a period of some thirty years and the intertitles are enlivened by quotations from Tennyson's poem "Break,

break, break" that seem to have only minimal relevance to the actual events.

The theme of the film—"Love, Beauty, Marriage", as an initial title informs us—has much in common with the pre-Soviet Russian films of the period and moves towards a climax of what the Pordenone programme notes describe as "damnation, redemption, mystical exaltation". The film begins with a sculptor making a statue of Aphrodite for his patron, a Prince; both men fall in love with her and, though she professes to place Love above all other motives, she ends up marrying the Prince for money. The rejected Giovanni continues to pursue her, however, and, when the Prince comes across them in a compromising situation, he promptly and dramatically has a heart attack and drops dead. Already suspicious of his wife, however, he had taken the precaution of leaving his fortune to her only if she never remarried; still putting mercenary motives ahead of emotional ones, she now refuses to marry Giovanni, even when she gives birth to his child a few months after the Prince's death. When he tries to take custody of their daughter, Juliette puts her in a convent and the dejected Giovanni decides to become a monk. Some years later, however, Giovanni accidentally encounters his daughter, abducts her, and leaves her to grow up with the family of a nearby fisherman.

More years pass and the plot becomes too complicated to disentangle in detail with any kind of brevity. Giovanni, who is now a priest, and Juliette meet once more and a series of romantic entanglements develop among the younger generation, which consists of their now adolescent daughter Marianne; her foster brother and sister Beppo and Camilla (though all think they are natural siblings); Juliette's stepson Paul from the Prince's previous marriage; and a jealous outsider, Danica, who professes an unrequited love for Beppo. After many misunderstandings, including fears of possible incest, all the young people end up with appropriate partners and Giovanni and Juliette abandon the hostility that has grown up between them. When she, however, somewhat belatedly attempts to rekindle the flames of their previous passion and even resumes the pose of Aphrodite that had originally brought them together, the sound of the church bell recalls Giovanni to his duties and he asks her to leave. The film ends with Giovanni on the seashore watching as they all depart and a double exposure places a lifesize cross beside him.

The film is, obviously enough, no masterpiece, but it probably reflects quite accurately a mainstream of bourgeois taste of the time, combining eroticism, spectacular scenery, luxurious interiors, costumes and furnishings, and a high-minded plot dealing with art, religion, duty and renunciation. *The Young Wife* (A leányasszony), also by Deésy and also from 1918, incorporates many of the same ingredients, in a complicated plot dealing with the emotional torments of a group of upper-class characters. Once again there is little specifically Hungarian about the setting, which in fact employs several of the same locations as *Aphrodite,* though there is one short scene in Budapest which, significantly, takes place in the Fishermen's Bastion, a favourite exotic tourist locale. (There are similarities here to the first wave of Hungarian co-productions with Western countries in the late 1980s, where scenes invariably took place in the most prominent of the city's landmarks and characters tended to live in luxurious apartments or hotels with a perfect view over the Danube and the Buda side of the river.)

In *The Young Wife* a rich Baron loses all his money gambling and leaves for

America to re-establish his fortune, entrusting his young daughter Veronika, together with the inheritance left her by her dead mother, to the care of a neighbour, a widowed Baroness with daughters of her own. Ten years pass and the Baroness has spent all Veronika's money and has begun to neglect her. Romantic rivalry between Veronika and one of the Baroness' daughters for the hand of a rich Count leads to further tension, but Veronika finally marries George, a poor but virtuous young composer instead. More years pass and George, after suffering a heart attack while performing at a party, is sent to the seaside to convalesce; meanwhile the Baroness, now reduced to poverty herself, receives a letter from Veronika's father, who has made his fortune in America and plans to return home. The Baroness arranges a reconciliation with Veronika and (for reasons which the film does not make particularly clear) persuades her to conceal both her marriage and the existence of her son from her father, who returns bringing with him a friend who he sees as a suitor for his daughter. The virtuous Veronika, gradually corrupted by the influence of the Baroness and the prospects of renewed luxury, persuades her husband, when he returns home restored to health, to continue with the deception, resulting in the somewhat ludicrous situtation of her being forced to visit him and her son in secret.

Retribution, however, is at hand: George's opera is accepted for performance, but, on the very night of the opening, their son falls seriously ill, with the doctor helpless to assist him. While Veronika flirts shamelessly with the guests at a party held by her father, George ignores frantic requests to come to the opera house to witness the triumph of his work. He seeks out Veronika at the party and she finally agrees to leave with him, but when they arrive home the child is dead. The repentant Veronika falls ill and seeks atonement by constantly visiting her son's grave; finally she explains everything to her father and asks for and receives forgiveness.

A few interesting stylistic touches enliven the moralizing of the plot, especially in scenes where characters visualize action taking place elsewhere or anticipate possible outcomes in their future, as where the convalescent George imagines both being welcomed and being rejected by Veronika on his return, or "sees" the performance of his opera while he is at the bedside of his dying son; but for the most part the filming is relatively unimaginative and the acting once again tends to over-emphasis in the many moments of emotional crisis.

These two films seem fairly representative of Deésy's work both in theme and in style and any further discoveries are unlikely to enhance his reputation to any great extent. A more interesting figure is Béla Balogh, three of whose films were screened at the festival. All three were made in 1920–21, after the fall of the Republic of Councils and during a period of right-wing political repression—which makes the outspoken social protest of the finest of them, *The Frozen Child* (A megfagyott gyermek, 1921) even more remarkable. Here we are very far from the anonymous Mitteleuropa world of Deésy, where wealthy and elegant characters agonize over the conflict between love and duty or have to choose between material and spiritual satisfaction. Instead, we are in a world of grinding poverty and misery that is given a very specific setting in place and time.

Ironically enough, the plot has many similarities to *The Young Wife,* though in a very different social milieu and treated very differently. Laci, the 5-year-old boy of the title, lives in a wretched little village with his widowed mother; his best friend is

Terike, a slightly older girl who lives next door with her widowed father. The opening scenes establish a sense of the routine of village life, with the children helping to look after the animals and celebrating the grape harvest and Christmas. But Laci's mother is in debt and her one possession, her cow, has to be sold at auction. (During this scene the boy offers to sell his own single possession, a small rocking horse, instead, but his attempt is ignored.) The mother decides to move to Pest (to a less glamorous, working-class part of Budapest), where Terike and her father now also live, so that the children are reunited, though their lives still remain harsh and impoverished. The scenes in Pest are shot on location and present a very different image of the city from that experienced by tourists, and the acting, by both children and adults, is far more naturalistic than in Deésy's films. They spend much of their time in the company of a blind man, dancing to the sound of his music box in the hope of earning a few coins, but are constantly harassed by an officious neighbour who sees their activities as degrading.

Like Veronika's father in *The Young Wife,* but in very different circumstances, Terike's father decides to go to America to seek his fortune, leaving his daughter in the care of Laci and his mother. The children continue their wandering life around the city, gaping in amazement at the lifestyle of rich children they encounter, and being chased away as nuisances, and occasionally getting lost. Their pitiful dreams of happiness and luxury are embodied in visions of a beautiful doll on Terike's part and a carriage on Laci's. Now Laci's mother falls ill and decides to return to the village for a few days to recuperate, taking Laci with her but leaving Terike in the care of the porter's wife in their apartment block, a spiteful and mean-minded woman who demands payment for doing even this small favour. In the village, Laci's mother collapses and dies, leaving her bewildered son to fend for himself; he manages to return to Pest, but the porter's wife refuses to take care of the children and throws them out on to the street, where they try to survive on their own but are mistreated and exploited, even by other children. They finally team up with the blind man until Terike—but not Laci—is summoned to join her father in America. Laci stays with the blind man till the latter is knocked down in the street and taken off to hospital; Laci, wandering on the river bank clutching the pitiful rag doll that Terike has left with him, is accosted by a drunk who throws the doll in the river. He tries to seek shelter from the porter's wife but is turned away; finally he makes his way back to the village and his mother's grave where he freezes to death in the snow.

A somewhat tongue-in-cheek epilogue attempts to enlighten the despair of the story by showing an angel transporting Laci's body to Heaven, where he is warmly welcomed by St. Peter. Heaven is filled with angels dancing and playing music; he is reunited with his mother, who gives him food to eat, and with the blind man and Terike; he is even given back his lost rocking horse. The wish-fulfilment fantasy, however, is abruptly, and literally, brought down to earth in a final shot that shows the boy's frozen body lying on the grave.

Though the plot certainly has its melodramatic aspects, these are largely counteracted by the starkness, intensity and indignation with which the story is told. Though much of the blame for the children's plight is placed on selfish and uncaring individuals, behind this is a larger criticism that asks why society allows this to happen and why no help is available to people whose sufferings are caused by

forces beyond their control or understanding. Here the other side of the Hungarian film tradition, the cinema of social and political criticism, finds one of its roots.

Balogh's two other surviving films, however, are rather different in theme and tone, and closer to the more escapist cinema of the time. The lengthy, two-part *The Fourteenth* (A tizennegyedik, 1920) presents the somewhat improbable fortunes of Jim Jeffries (much of the film seems to be set in London), a layabout who is picked at random off the street to make a fourteenth guest at table at a dinner party, where he becomes involved in the shady financial machinations of a crooked Prince and Baron. His native wit and shrewdness enable him to exploit the situation and soon bring him wealth and social position, though he never abandons his cronies from the past and makes use of them to protect him from the double-dealing of his new associates, who increasingly resent his success. Various episodes of intrigue, plotting and attempted murder and kidnapping end with Jeffries reduced to something like his original condition, but rescued once more by a stroke of chance that has him married to a rich young woman whose guardian wishes in this way to control her fortune. The marriage, which is performed with both parties blindfolded, is a pure formality, and after it Jeffries is bribed to set off for America on his own.

In the film's second part, the hero, now calling himself Riche Richson, engages once more in unscrupulous financial and romantic entanglements, but the tone now is rather more light-hearted and comic. In the film's best scene—which strangely anticipates in some respects the famous "Walls of Jericho" motel scenes in Frank Capra's *It Happened One Night* a decade or so later, the hero meets up with his wife on a train; neither, of course, recognizes the other and, when the train breaks down, they have to share a room overnight in a hotel. She rigs up a curtain around her bed to shield herself from possible unwelcome advances, and he gallantly gives her a pistol so that she can defend herself if his self-control breaks down. After a chaste night's sleep, he wakens her in the morning by coming to her bedside and kissing her; she grabs the gun and he unfolds his clenched fist to show that he has removed the bullets: "You can't always trust the word of a gentleman," he advises her smilingly. Finally the various misunderstandings are cleared up in a scene filled with comic revelations and reactions and all ends happily. The film seems to have had no higher purpose than sheer entertainment—suspense in the first part and comedy in the second—but it achieves its limited aims efficiently and smoothly enough.

Under the Mountains (Hegyek alján, 1920) is different again, and based on an opera *Tiefland* (1903) by Eugen d'Albert that was also filmed by Leni Riefenstahl in 1944. The plot concerns the sexual rivalry for the favours of Marta, the heroine, between Petr, a naive and virtuous goatherd, and an unscrupulous older man who is openly having an affair with Marta while trying to arrange a marriage with the daughter of a rich villager. The older man persuades Petr to marry Marta, fully intending to continue his affair with her after his own marriage; Marta reluctantly accepts, but—to the scorn of the neighbours—refuses to consummate the marriage and forces Petr to sleep outdoors in the street. When Petr, however, proves his manhood by confronting his rival in public and accidentally killing him—even wounding Marta in the course of the struggle—she is happy to go off to live with him in the mountains, with the blessings of the villagers who conclude that the killing is acceptable as "a judgement of God".

The main virtues of the film are in the location shooting and the strong characterization that create a sense of genuine realism from the melodramatic events. A flashback, explaining Marta's association with her unscrupulous lover as the result of her literally being sold to him as a child by her brutal stepfather, introduces an undercurrent of social commentary that is reinforced by the obvious divide between wealth and poverty within the village itself. According to Balogh's daughter Mária Szepes (who played the role of Terike in *The Frozen Child*), her father made nearly one hundred silent and sound films; on the evidence of these three, it is to be hoped that more of them will be rediscovered.

The only feature film by Korda to have surfaced to date, *The Golden Man* (Az aranyember, 1918), based on a novel by the prolific and popular Mór Jókai, is fortunately one of his most spectacular and successful productions. Originally 16 reels (almost three hours) in length, but later cut to closer to two hours, it deals with the exploits of Mihály Tímár, the servant of a Greek merchant who is attempting to escape with his daughter and his fortune from the Turkish empire. When his employer poisons himself in order to avoid capture, Tímár takes the opportunity to steal the money (which is, of course, the property of the daughter Tímea) and, after taking refuge for a time with a woman friend and her daughter Noémi on a small island in the Danube, returns to the city with Tímea, leaving her in the care of his mother and step-sister while he sets off to increase his ill-gotten gains and establish his position in society. His relatives abuse and exploit Tímea, however, and his conscience eventually forces him to marry her; but he later also establishes a second household and family with Noémi. Throughout the film, first the merchant and then Tímár have been pursued by a mysterious stranger, Tódor Krisztyán, who knows both about the stolen money and Tímár's double life, and attempts to blackmail him. After a confrontation between the two men, Krisztyán dies accidentally and, as he is wearing Tímár's clothes that he has stolen from him, his body is identified as Tímár's, leaving the latter to continue his life with his true love Noémi while Tímea (who had accepted the marriage reluctantly in the first place) is free to marry a lover whose attentions she had virtuously resisted up till then.

The film is conceived and executed on an epic scale, with vigorous characterization and some spectacular scenes of storms and shipwreck on the Danube. The acting, though stagey at times, is generally convincing, the camerawork is skilful and inventive, and there are many subtle and atmospheric lighting effects. It is easy to see on the basis of this how Korda, after relatively unsuccessful interludes in Germany, Austria and Hollywood, should have come to create such grandiose works as *The Private Life of Henry VIII* and *Rembrandt* in Britain during the 1930s.

Not all "lost" films are silents, however, and, worldwide, many significant works from the early sound period in particular have disappeared. In the case of Hungary, one especially unfortunate loss from the 1930s—a decade that otherwise produced little of value in that country—was thought to be *The Sentence of the Lake* (Itél a Balaton) one of two films that Pál Fejos made in 1931 during a brief return to his native country after becoming disillusioned with working in Hollywood (despite achieving considerable success there). The second film, *Spring Shower* (Tavaszi zápor) has long been known and admired, but it is only recently that a print of *Sentence of the Lake* has been rediscovered. As it is a sound film, it was not, of course, shown at

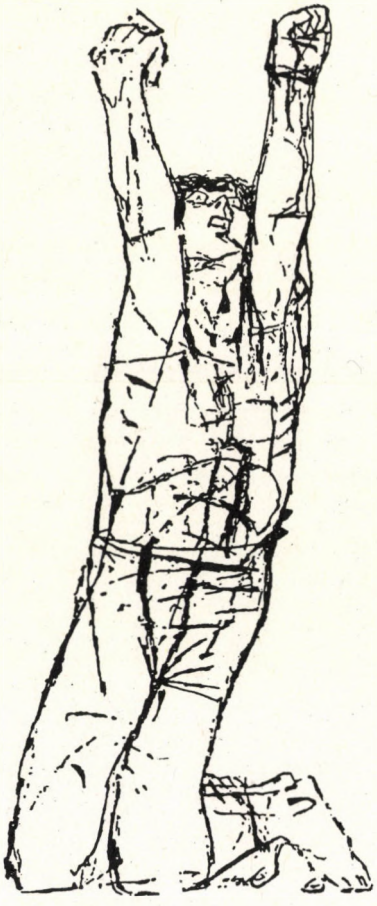
Pordenone, and it has already been briefly discussed in *The Hungarian Quarterly* (No. 139, Vol. 36, Autumn 1995, pp. 143) by István Nemeskürty. I include it here for the sake of completeness, however, and also because Mr. Nemeskürty unfortunately describes the film's ending incorrectly: as my own viewing and published synopses of the film confirm, it is the husband who sacrifices himself for the sake of his wife's lover, rather than the other way round—which makes the film even more subversive and controversial.

Sentence of the Lake is a work of considerable power that foreshadows in many respects the Italian Neo-realist films of the 1940s, especially Luchino Visconti's *La Terra Trema,* whose setting of a fishing village and the dangerous lives of the fishermen it closely resembles. The story has a fairly traditional Romeo and Juliet theme, with the richest fisherman in the village refusing to allow his daughter Maria to marry her sweetheart Mihály from the rival Kovács family and forcing her to marry one of his underlings, János, instead. Maria and Mihály continue to yearn chastely for each other, attracting the attention of the villagers who soon attribute the unexpected failure of the fishing expeditions to János' inadequacy as a husband and the problems in his marriage. One day the desperate fishermen set out once more despite obvious signs of a storm brewing; after hours of prayer and suspense on the part of the villagers, the men finally return empty-handed yet again. To the indignation of the villagers, Maria openly embraces Mihály in relief at his safe return, and János and the women of the village promptly accuse her of causing the storm and insist that she should be put to the traditional ordeal of being set adrift on the lake in a small boat; if she survives, she is innocent. The horrified Mihály sets off after her, quickly followed by the repentant János; both their boats are overturned by the waves and, after the men have struggled with each other in the water, János manages to climb into Maria's boat. She pleads with him, however, to save the drowning Mihály, her true love; he does so and then, seeing Maria tenderly embrace her lover, he allows himself to slip back into the water and drown. The storm subsides and Maria and Mihály, now unable to return to the village, sail on together into the sunrise.

The power of the film comes largely from the realism with which the somewhat conventional story (apart from the ending, which must have contributed to the displeasure with which the film was officially received) was filmed. The storm scenes, shot on location with the camera obviously in the midst of the action, are vivid and convincing, as is the presentation of the rhythms and rituals of village life—a sermon by the priest warning against family hatreds and rivalries; relaxation at a fairground with music and dancing; the celebration of the grape harvest; the marriage ceremony and the wedding feast, with the bride's dowry solemnly carried to her new home; the harsh and precarious daily existence of the fishermen and the relief with which a successful catch is greeted; the women waiting anxiously, clustered round a huge cross in the village square, as the storm threatens their menfolk. The camera is constantly mobile and the editing effectively contrasts moments of relaxation and festivity with those of danger and suspense. One particularly successful sequence shows Maria and Mihály walking away from the grape harvest on opposite sides of the road, with the cutting first separating them as they exchange shy smiles and then joining them as Mihály plucks up courage to approach her and give her a present. The mood here is remi-

niscent of Fejos' finest American film, *Lonesome,* and is a reminder of the loss to the Hungarian film industry that resulted when the unfavourable reception of *Spring Shower* and *Sentence of the Lake* (both accused of subverting accepted moral standards) sent him on his travels once more.

What, briefly, can be concluded from this survey of the remnants of a once flourishing film tradition? First, perhaps, that, up till 1919 at least, Hungarian cinema was capable of producing works that were technically accomplished and, at their best (as in *The Golden Man*) could provide sophisticated and intelligent entertainment, though they seem rarely to have attempted to go much further than this. After a brief flurry of overtly political work in 1919, censorship and repression silenced or exiled much of the finest talent, though films such as *The Frozen Child* proved that some degree of social criticism still survived, an example that was followed in Fejos' films of the 1930s and a handful of films in the 1940s. The generation that came to maturity in the mid-1960s restored that tradition, whether consciously or not, and produced a series of films acclaimed all over the world. In the cold free market environment of the 1990s the aim appears to be to retrench, to have few higher ambitions than those of Deésy or Korda. This may be understandable and even inevitable, but it is unlikely, unfortunately, to produce many enduring masterpieces. ❧



THE LEGACY OF THE 1956 HUNGARIAN REVOLUTION

Five participants
forty years later:

Andrew P. Fodor
János Horváth
Béla K. Király
Károly Nagy
László Papp

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It fell to writing, especially the writing of poetry, to carry every burden, national and social; when, especially for national minorities here in Eastern Central Europe, poetry—to coin a biological metaphor—was the only possible metabolism in our intellectual life. We had to metaphorize everything, or the reader did it for us, forever reading between the lines, searching for the hidden meaning. And as the Holy Writ says, Seek and ye shall find.

Looking back, many laughable examples and laughable cases come to mind. The empathy of readers, this capacity to project themselves onto what they were reading, not only increased the strength and power of the written word, but made legends of certain writers, whose every manifestation was followed with close attention, whose every word was devoutly passed on. If a certain Someone, generally mentioned by first name only, happened to say in the dead of winter that spring would be here soon, word would get about that winter was coming to an end, it would soon be spring—and it was not just any person who had said so. And this would be emphasized by a wink.

From Sándor Kányádi: Metaphors Coming Apart at the Seams, pp. 54–65.

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